Albert Fenn
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# GEORGE HERN.

A Novel.

BY

HENRY GLEMHAM.

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# GEORGE HERN.

## CHAPTER I.

THE Castle House family sat down to breakfast at a rather late hour on the following morning, and, before the coffee was fairly poured out, Mr. Oscar Ashbocking entered to them hurriedly, and looking less fresh and neat than usual.

"I am sorry to disturb you," he said, declining to go to the table, but taking a seat by one of the windows without ceremony, "but we have had such a night. Scarcely a minute of sleep, but hour after hour of

discussion! Mary Ann, however, would get up at the customary time this morning."

"I should have taken my breakfast in bed this morning, I believe," said Mrs. Kidd, fingering her favourite indoor green shawl; "for I take after papa in liking that; but I should have been thinking and fretting and wondering, and what's the use of being in bed so?"

"You certainly look depressed," said the town-clerk, kindly; "though you will never, I think, have such a pale and languishing complexion as the Chinese taste demands. As to breakfast in bed, Mary Ann has a great objection to it. I wish, however, that she had overcome her objection this morning, for she is very sadly with neuralgia and headache, and I insisted upon sending Dr. Staggold to her, though I had not a trivial battle for my point. I have just left the doctor's

house, and I thought I should like a few words with you."

"We are all sadly," said Mrs. Kidd, with a disconsolate sigh; "even Bilge looks quite bilious this morning, and Ariel has been coughing in the very sunshine."

"I have never seen Mary Ann more irritable," said Mr. Oscar, ruefully. "Not that I would for a moment accuse her of that 'excitability-without-ability' which is one of the most trying qualities in human nature to a thinker. But she has been most difficult to please this morning. She even said that though she had no fear that our own accounts would bear the test of the most searching audit, still she could not quite shake off anxiety on this point. Then she said that we might, after all, have a rival solicitor settling in the town, and it might be wise for me to call about among my friends in my leisure hours (which, indeed, are not like

those of Don Quixote, many,) instead of spending the greater part of them in the study."

"Making friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," suggested Storker.

"Let us say, 'courting popularity,'" said Mr. Oscar. "She next made a suggestion which is becoming, I think, a favourite one, viz., that I should write a book, embodying the fruits of my readings. She is generally, however, very liberal in her judgments on me."

"Some people are so illiberal in the making of friends," said Storker, "that we can, perhaps, hardly wonder that they are over-liberal in their judgments on the few they have."

"Poor Mary Ann!" said Mrs. Kidd. "I wonder she didn't want you to reduce the wages of Swidger and Trippington."

"Upon my word, Bella!" cried Mr. Oscar,

"she did make this suggestion, and the same minute made me promise that, if I carried out certain proposed repairs to a cottage in Ashbocking Street, I would arrange to let her have the old laths and fragments of wood for kindling. I am rather glad to be able to say a few words to Kidd in her absence—that is, after he has finished his breakfast."

"For my part, sir," said Storker, "I think women are generally as great an incumbrance when real business is discussed as a spoiled child with a drum."

"Your grandpapa didn't like to have too many ladies present at meals," said Mrs. Kidd, "for he used to say they must be helped first—even the young girls—and the joint is cold before the gentlemen get their share."

"He was doubtless and decidedly right," exclaimed Storker; "and I would rather

have a bit of good hot mutton hacked off with a dragoon's sabre than a silver-plate-ful of tepid peacock. Won't you take one cup of coffee, Mr. Oscar?"

"No, thank you. Nectar wouldn't tempt me this morning. I could eat but little breakfast at home. On such an occasion I feel tempted to wish that I had a portion of the late Admiral's heartiness of appetite. A steak-pie I had to turn away from very recently he would have attacked with the resolute activity of Alaric the Goth. Still, I can't help thinking that if Jove had passed such a night as I have just passed, he could not have eaten Metis at this moment."

"I can imagine it would be difficult for a cook to serve up a steak to the satisfaction of a man with a bad gum-boil," said Storker; "but I should have thought she might have overcome trouble of mind and anxious nights."

The breakfast lasted but a short time after this. Storker's allusion to a gum-boil elicited from the visitor a few words about odaxismus; a remark upon the butter drew from him a passage he had recently read about the shea tolu of Africa; and a glance at the sky led him to refer to the opinion of Herodotus and others as to its solidity; from which subject he passed on to a few of the peculiar opinions on Nature held respectively by the Greeks, the Romans, the Minnesingers, the Persians, and the Indians.

Whilst he was engaged on the last of these subjects Bilge entered the room.

"George Boulder is at the front door, sir," he said to his master. "I told him you were at breakfast, but he was obstinate an' interruptin' like, an' said he must see you."

Mr. Kidd turned to his cousin.

"Can he have heard anything already?"

he asked, in a low and rather apprehensive tone.

The eavesdropping butler understood the glance, though he did not hear the words.

"He was drinkin' again a few nights ago," he said, "an' it may be one of his tipsy fancies, comin' here. He talks a little wild-like, an' says that for the sake of old friendship you ought to see him immediate."

"Ah," said Mr. Oscar, "from a rather dispirited word or two dropped by George Hern, I suspected that Boulder had broken out. Yet he told me that the old man bore the loss of Hole's boat very manfully. I think he was a little hurt by a certain recent attitude of Hern's in respect to what I will call a trouble-surrounded subject."

"Boulder was drunk, sir, on that very evenin' that Hole's boat went down," said Bilge, "but before he heard o' the loss.

I ain't awares, however, that he's been drinkin' since, but I think it likely he haven't recovered from the last touch, sir."

"Tell him, Bilge," said Mr. Oscar, "with my compliments, that I particularly wish to see him at my office one hour hence, but that I want Mr. Kidd's company myself at present. We have decided," he added, as Bilge left the room, "to make a compromise with Boulder and George Hern, which will result in the removal of them both from this place."

Bilge very soon returned with a message from Boulder that he must see Mr. Oscar or Mr. Kidd personally.

"I told him to be off, sir," said the butler, "but he said he would see me at Jericho first, an' then he wouldn't obey me."

The town-clerk settled the matter by going to the front door at once.

"He has suspicions," he remarked on his

return, "of which I shall doubtless hear more soon. We are rid of him for the present. He has been drinking a little this morning, I think."

"O dear, dear," said Mrs. Kidd, folding her hands and lifting her eyebrows. "The temptations of strong drink, how terrible! I have heard papa talk of a man who travelled for a bristle-merchant, and who went to see his brother, and found him out; so he consoled himself by drinking the whole of a four-and-a-half gallon cask of strong ale and a bottle of rum."

"I once knew a man," said Storker, "a law-wig-maker named Pelt, who got into a cellar where there was a leaky stout-cask, and settled himself under it with open mouth. He was found two days afterwards in a deep sleep, with a face like a mouldy nigger-mask, and the stout still trickling in between his jaws."

"Ah," said Mrs. Kidd, "and I shall never forget when Major Dobbs came to papa's, about two years before I married—when you were half-engaged to Amelia Chatteris of Rettingham St. Ives, Kidd—he made himself so tipsy that he remained shut up in the green bed-room for a day and two nights, and then left the house without bidding me good-bye."

At the conclusion of this remark Mrs. Kidd withdrew, and the three gentlemen walked into the garden, Mr. Kidd and his son furnished with their pipes.

"To proceed to business at once," said Mr. Oscar, "I think that my position in the town will enable me to get you through your difficulties without unnecessary delay, without hasty and forced realization, and without resorting to bankruptcy proceedings. I am of course aware that Lord Coke, Lord Mansfield (to whose Latin style I should

have referred the other day when talking on the subject, Storker), and other eminent men, have said that these proceedings can be unfairly used in favour of debtors; but, as a great modern lawyer has remarked, 'they are never very pleasant.' I think that if I at once send circulars to the creditors—almost all local ones—and call a preliminary meeting for this evening (the sooner the better, for the news will cause a sort of panic) we might make this gathering of much more significance than a mere preliminary one. I will ask the creditors to let you assign everything to me, either alone or jointly with one of their number, and I will give an undertaking to handle the assets honourably, and to the best of my ability to the advantage of the creditors. I can then probably pay a dividend very soon, which will give satisfaction; for creditors in suspense are like the Revenue officials, very unwilling to wait long

for their money. I can settle with you afterwards."

"I like the sound of your suggestion," said Mr. Kidd. "I will do everything you advise."

"Mary Ann says that the deed of assignment between us should be as stringent as if made with a Public Department," said Mr. Oscar; "but that is a lawyer's point. On another recommendation of hers, viz., that no time should be wasted, I have acted, for I have this morning with my own hand written circulars to some of the more important Heathhammock creditors, which will be duly delivered after my return. With the help of my clerks a printed copy will be in the hands of every local creditor very shortly. Perhaps we should absolve Storker from helping in this task."

"Oh, I'll help," said Storker, stoutly. "I'm glad to think it's probable that we shall

be in your hands, sir, for I am sure you will show us consideration. I little thought, when I was wasting time in America, that this rock lay ahead of me; though I remember thinking a day or two after my return, what a miserable business it would be if an ugly turn of fortune's wheel should deprive me of table-napkins, especially on days when I had such items as herring for breakfast, duck and onions for dinner, and shrimps for tea. Now, I suppose, I must prepare for a deprivation of some of the pungent matter as well as of the napkins. I must be contented with the 'biscuit' without the 'confectionary plum.' Don't write me down 'ass,' sir, or think me frivolous. I am little inclined for hearty merriment. An empty pocket is apt to impart some of its hollowness to a man's laughter, I think."

"I trust you will never have to chew grass

and paper, like Chateaubriand," said Mr. Oscar. "But, Storker, though I shall be glad to help you to the best of my ability, you will have to depend mainly on your own exertions for the future. 'For you,' to use Hebel's words, 'there are not many larks flying about in the air ready roasted.' Though the only son, and therefore pretty sure of securing whatever your parents may possess, whether its descent be ruled by the Common Law, the custom of Gavelkind, or that of Borough English (which in giving the inheritance to the youngest son resembles the law of the Tartars), unfortunately, there is a probability of their possessions being 'nil.'"

"I don't wish to say anything against the Admiral, or to refer to the hints he used to drop about providing for Storker," said Mr. Kidd; "but it is easy to see, now, why he confined his praises to the past so empha-

tically. The future didn't present a pleasing picture to him."

"Ah, well," said Storker, "if he had left us a fortune, perhaps it would have set us up about as effectually as you could whiten a Maroon negro's skull by snow-balling it. By George, though, the curtailing of my holidays will be as a blister and a cicatrix to me. I confess that, for no weather will make lying in season."

"I applaud that last sentiment, Storker," said Mr. Oscar. "A quaint historian who wrote of the reign of Edward III., says that at that time 'old antient truth was like threadbare garments, esteemed a vile disgrace to cloath a courtier.' Let us hope an improvement has taken place since then, for as a Hindoo writer says, 'He who knows truth knows the Deity.' And what says A' Kempis?"

"What an unreckonable sensation there

will be when your circulars are well on the way!" said Storker, after a pause. "Many a man will be pouring forth his soul in tones not soft."

"I dare say," said Mr. Oscar, "that some creditors with paltry claims of little more value than Kidd's rusty wide-awake or his umbrella, which Mary Ann calls 'baggy and disreputable,' will be cursing as furiously as if all the asses mentioned by Livy would not repay their losses. I have sometimes thought that if the powers of our ears were considerably enlarged, the world would be a far more interesting theatre; but to-day, Kidd, I am glad your hearing powers are limited."

"I have heard little speeches of yours rather warmly applauded, father," said Storker; "but the statement (if any) which you will make at the meeting this evening is likely to earn the sort of applause from the

creditors that a wailing of cats would from a boy with a whip. And you a man who could scarcely utter an unkind word, and who would be miserable if you forgot to give an expected 'tip.' I hope, however, we shan't be mobbed. I hate a rascally mob!"

"Even a Scotch Liberal does that, Gillies tells us," said Mr. Oscar. "Strange to say, I was recently comparing the opinions of Ausonius, Bolingbroke, Raumer, Rapier and Mill on the subject of public gatherings."

"Pray don't refer me to my punishment," said Mr. Kidd. "I hope I shan't be compelled to believe in the truth of the misanthropic jeremiade, that if one gets a blackened eye and a bruised mouth, the public will be ready to break his nose."

"If you were, so to speak, down among the grubs and could not see any butterflies, you wouldn't lose heart altogether," said Storker. "You would be conjuring up hopes

of one day carrying out a scheme to cover a wilderness with factories."

"It's rather hard (with a consciousness of possessing business faculties) to think it's possible that my day is over," said Mr. Kidd, in a low voice; "that I must give place and have my harness cut off—a relief, I grant, whatever the violence done to my vanity—and to slink into the shade."

"Public opinion peers over the world, as it were, with a keener eye than of yore," said Mr. Oscar, "and one must be capable, careful and alert. I have sometimes thought that Edrisi might be laughed out of a grammar-school in these days if he offered his silver globe for the pupils' instruction."

"Still I shall hope for better days," said Mr. Kidd. "I shall be able, I trust, to prove that my life has not been a failure altogether."

"How, sir?" asked Storker, with slightly

twinkling eyes, "with evidence as strong as a quack's oath that he has charmed away a wart."

"You are sarcastic, Storker," replied his father; "but I am not surprised at your feeling hurt."

"We must trust that this misfortune may not prove profitless to him," said Mr. Oscar gently. "Sometimes when we think we should be pitied for being persecuted, we should be congratulated for being drilled with fitting severity."

"A fortunate series of accidents may yet happen," said Mr. Kidd, "however unexpected."

"Accidents!" cried Storker. "Well, it's not easy to drop your knife upon the salt-spoon so as to tilt it into the claret-jug, yet I have seen this exploit done neatly by accident. But I shall want a pretty pregnant accident to console hopes that have been

drained, as it were, as thoroughly as a water-caraffe in the morning after a night of wine."

"Whatever happens," said Mr. Kidd, touching his forehead, "no one can take away the contents of this. As to money, my experience leads me to think that it is a cause of anxiety rather than of comfort; and to many, I think, it is like the clouds fo heaven, only beautiful and enjoyable at a distance."

"Of course it will soon prove a cause of anxiety if a man gives away a toparchy when he could content the receiver with twopence," said Storker.

"Ah, my lad," said his father, "when you jeer at liberality you should remember that it is akin to a very pleasant quality—unselfishness; and you should also remember how many faults and shallow thoughts are born of man's self-love"

"Perhaps," said Mr. Oscar, "when one feels inclined to say that life is a poor tale, one might take consolation in recollecting that it is hard to find the essential right of anything, that man's is ever a patched and piecemeal judgment, and that when one thinks another entirely in the wrong, he is half-way towards it himself."

"Yes," said Mr. Kidd," and after all, if a man chooses to burn his tallow in the sunlight, or to carry a wren's egg in a coach-and-four, some one will be the gainer."

"And, probably, some one besides himself the loser," said Storker, "as you will learn to-night and often afterwards."

"I dare say that some in Heathhammock will prove English in their distrust, after one miscarriage, of a person they confided in," said Mr. Oscar. "But now I must go to the office."

"Thank you for your kindness, Oscar,"

said Mr. Kidd. "I hope I shall experience a little from the public, for I have done not a few good turns to others in my time."

## CHAPTER II.

VERY soon after Mr. Oscar's arrival at his office, but not before most of his clerks had received some instructions in connection with the impending meeting of creditors, George Boulder was ushered in to him by Amos Splint, who gave the fisherman an inquisitive and meaning glance before he turned away.

"Sit down, Boulder," said the town-clerk. "I have no sherry here to offer you, and, indeed, this is not a time to think of such things. But I suspect, to my great regret, that you have already been taking a little strong drink this morning. I understand

that you have broken out again recently. Let me urge you to renounce this evil again, and at once. It's a poor and treacherous remedy for disappointment, my friend. A day's discontinuance of a bad habit is often the prelude to a month's, and that to a year's. A day's indulgence, on the other hand, may result in equal degree to your prejudice, until the most earnest persuasions, nay, all Dean Bolton's letters, would be utterly powerless to convert you."

"I've kep' straight an' ship-shape an' firm a deuced long time," said Boulder, not at all good-humouredly. "But, may be, the sinkin' o' Reuben Hole's boat was a judgment like on me for slippin' from my anchor again. But get to the matter in hand, sir."

"I will. So you heard through Mr. Swindell that all was not right at Castle House and the Bank, and his informant was Mr. Bilge? He must have been 'un-

heard and unespied' when he gathered his news."

"He was at the keyhole," said Boulder. "He's a sneaking rascal—a don't-take-no-notice sort o' fellow, innicent-lookin', but a knowin' dorg, who has dabbled in his time in some o' the filth o' the world. Give me a touzle-headed man with a honest heart, an' not a shiny-haired smilin' rogue."

"He certainly has not 'the Heaven-regarding eye, the front sublime!'" said Mr. Oscar; "and this want cannot be compensated for by the outward turning of the palms, or even the smiting of the breast (though this last gesture, as in the case of Harpagus, I think, may not be a mere piece of affectation)."

"And now, sir," said Boulder, angrily, "What have you got to say? A while ago, up at Castle House, you told me that this here out-an'-out misfortun' was not to hurt me nor yet my son overmuch. Come to

that, sir, the real thing an' no flies; for I should think you feel it ain't hardly right to keep a robbed an' a injured man in damnable uncertainty. Think o' the loss of this money, —this money that I, as used to be a generous chap, hev scraped up an' thought on night an' day, an' slaved for an' kep' steady for, an' boasted on, an' bet on, an' lived in lodgings for cheapness sake; an' gone to church, an' had prayers at home, an' kep' respectable. All for this money an' the boy."

"Calm yourself, Boulder," said Mr. Oscar. "The 'baleful fire of anger' is as incongruous a trespasser in an argument as the spirit of the fist-ruled playground in the tutor's class-room."

"Anger!" exclaimed Boulder, vehemently. "Breath o' my body! The world's comin' to such a pitch, it seem to me, there's like to be anger enough about. It seem to me the world is comin' to be rotten!"

"Most men are periodically moved by opinions as to the need of reform in the world as emphatic as those of Prometheus," said Mr. Oscar.

"Come, sir, you said you had somethin' to say, some comfort to give," said Boulder, leaning forward in his chair and gazing fixedly at his companion. "I've lost fifty poun' by the little bit o' Roger's blast that sent Reuben Hole an' his boat to the bottom, an' my ole neighbour, Widow Josham, lent me a trifle a week ago come to-morrow, to make my fund look better in this here wrecked bank; but right's right, an' I'll pay her back, if I have to sleep on a brick-floor, with my ole monkey-jacket for a piller. These be hard things for a man that a few evenin's ago was beginnin' to make a flag to hang out o' winder when the boy got through his examination, an' the brighter days begin. But all my pleasures seem

somehow to hev a touch of bitter in 'em, an' there may be somethin' in William Hern's curse after all."

"No, no. Let us forthwith consider the comfort that I have to offer you, Boulder," said Mr. Oscar, kindly. "You and your son have engaged a far larger share of my consideration than any other creditor of Mr. Kidd Ashbocking; and Mrs. Ashbocking and I ——"

"Ah," said Boulder, "I wish we could keep the women out o' the matter; but go on, sir."

"I can't endorse that sentiment, though my wife has been a little hard with me sometimes, just recently," said Mr. Oscar. "This good and careful lady and I last night most fully discussed the position of yourself and your son, as affected by the misfortune of Mr. Kidd—no matter what is the probable extent of that misfortune."

"He's a fiddler, sir," said Boulder, sternly. "Though he knew somethin' o' the sea, an was a friend like to me, he must ha' bin' a shockin' noodle, sir."

"His weaknesses will soon be criticised pleonastically enough," said Mr. Oscar. "To resume: the conclusion that Mrs. Ashbocking and I at length came to was, that I should make you this offer, viz., On condition of the removal of yourself and George Hern, after his examination, to Australia, where there is a good sphere of action for a qualified solicitor, I, though well aware of the value of money, am willing to take the proceeds of such of your effects as you don't take with you, and also whatever remains of your bank-money, and to release you entirely from the balance of your debt to me. I venture to add that I will settle with Mrs. Josham also. What do you say to this proposal?"

"There's a kind sound in your words,

sir," said Boulder, lifting his hand to his forehead; "but I'm rather stammed like. Your offer sound fair an' generous, but I must speak to the boy, sir."

"I shall be indeed sorry—most sorry—to part with your son," said Mr. Oscar, warmly; "but I trust that the professional knowledge and the miscellaneous culture I have imparted to him will prove of service wherever he goes. On the passage over, he will be able to surprise the best informed of his fellow-passengers by historical quotations from Ducas and Heeren. But, Boulder, I won't disguise from you the fact that our conviction that it is expedient that George should leave Heathhammock has had no little effect upon our determination that this offer should be made you."

"O' course, o' course," said Boulder; "but I can't be sure he will go, though I'll tell you this, he's o' late spoke like a man, ay,

the true, good man he is, an' said more 'an once, that I'm to stan' first with him. But for this very reason," he added, striking his knee, " I 'on't go agin' him sharp an' stern in nothin'. And suppose this here plan should upset him, an' make him throw over his steadiness an' turn soldier or sailor? I wouldn't hev him even a militiaman for twenty poun'."

" Our modern militiaman is perhaps a poor specimen of the 'miles gloriosus,'" said Mr. Oscar, " and would hardly understand the spirit of discipline which animated such men as Tempanius, who would on no account give his judgment against his superior officer."

" I'm thinkin', sir, you don't noways un'erstan' how soldierin' and sailorin' tempt a man like George ?"

" Perhaps not. I would certainly rather read about bilanders and bomb-ketches than

serve in an ironclad. As a soldier I should be, as a good judge of human nature tells us the Arabs are, very careful of being wounded; and as a sailor I should strongly object to being drowned, though I should not adopt the remedy of Timocrates, who slew himself when his ship was sinking. Warfare is a more deadly business now than when Metellus and Marius marched against Jugurtha, and I confess I should much rather face an array of martins' nest-hollows than the cannon-holes of Ehrenbreitstein. But I must not have you think me pedantic. Speaking for yourself, as I may say, does my suggestion please you?"

"Please! I don't seem to hev the power to say, 'Ay.' I don't know what to answer," said Boulder, rather gloomily. "I'm an ole dorg to shift about an' change my habits an' doinses; but I shall be pleased, in a manner, to go with George wherever he go. None

the more, I can't be pleased to hev failed in what I undertook, an' to be done out o' my money. An' though you take me by the hand, sir, it's my bein' out o' luck as make you. There's luck an' there's out o' luck, an' I want the luck or I ain't contented. Don't shake your head, sir—it's natur'. The very Scriptur's with me—Adam, to begin with—was he contented?"

"You mustn't take his fatal discontent as an example," said Mr. Oscar; "though I think your words illustrate the irrational and unjust attacks of a class of critics upon Revelation, men who would fain call the saving of Rahab and the Master's mercy towards the Magdalen and the adulterous woman encouragements of vice. I trust you will soon find contentment in your altered circumstances. The world, to one who is without contentment (with its concomitant benevolence), is little better than his grave."

"One day, may be, I'll be better able to profit by this good teachin'," said Boulder, after a pause, "but things are dirty now; an' as to benevolence, which you spoke of just now, if I unnerstan' the word, it's what you're showin' me now, an' I thank you. But, as to myself, for a time to come I'll want a rare dole of it from some one afore I can spare a bit for another body. Others, o' course, 'ill be worse done by in this bankin' wreck than me. I don't envy 'em, sir, but, none the more, they don't comfort me."

"I can well understand that the fact of your suffering in common with heavier losers is likely to comfort you little more than the knowledge that eleven princes fell with him would comfort a dying soldier at Crecy. But, Boulder, though you no longer enjoy the 'genial sense of youth,' which is apt, indeed, to lead to foolish self-conceit (I can remember when I thought I could write

an epic poem, if I had plenty of time, and a rhyming dictionary), you are surely not afraid to face the world still in another sphere? You are not like the Sombre Sand-grouse, strong and active, but a croucher on the ground in time of peril? You will overcome your chagrin, and will not, as in the case of Godwin's Mandeville, suffer all the wholesome juices of your nature to convert themselves into gall. You have given many proofs of the strength of your will, and have made it felt by others more than once in the lifeboat and elsewhere."

"I'm a 'ole man," said Boulder, "but I'm jealous, like, o' the little futur' that's left me. The past is a poor pictur' for anybody to amuse himself."

"It should not be so altogether. There are times, I think, when a Pole will recall with pleasure the glories of Vanda or Bolislau the First. Admiral Howsegoe, I

admit, was rather too fond of recalling the past."

"I like to look ahid," said Boulder. "I dessay I can do in Australy. There was a time when they called me 'Young Australy,' for I took three voyages there—one upon another—quick. I dessay I can do, even if I live inland an' turn farmer, an' go hoein' o' beet, an' milkin' o' cows, an' feedin' of hens, an' lookin' for eggs. But I'd like to be near the sea—that's my place. This eye is a' eddicated eye for the sea, an' has peeped an' watched through devilish weathers and thick sprays, early an' late, from a ship's look-out; an' few could tell more true what rain hev fell in the night by the taste o' the sea in the mornin'. I shall never come to the workhouse, I hope. Ay, by heaven, I hope that, an' know it!"

"Swedenborg's description—'in contempt and misery in infernal workhouses'—might,

you think, be applied to our terrestrial institutions? You speak as if you would as well accept 'easeful death' itself."

"I hate the name o' the place," said Boulder, "though my boy first saw the light in one! But that hain't left no more taint on him than April hail on a meadder. Well, sir, I'll talk these matters over with George at dinner-time," he added, rising, "for I 'spect you won't like him to be interrupted now, an' I couldn't speak to him so much at my ease here, nayther, as at home. But this is our last day wi' Bayard Swindell, sir. I had a few words this mornin' and we agreed to part company."

"How did the quarrel arise? Did they think the mishap at the bank hinted at by Bilge would render your payments doubtful?"

"Partlys that, sir, p'r'aps, for the takin' o' the good ballast out of a man's pocket don't

make him rise in the good graces of his frien's. Bilge came in with his news this mornin' early, an' they stopped me as I was going downstairs, an' called me into the room. That smirkin' Bilge hev in secret bin very bitter and glum since th' Admiral's death, for he thought he was going to be named in the will, an' the words that was said about you an' yours, sir, didn't please me, for you've allays bin more or less a good-intentioned frien' to me an' my boy, an' them as call you 'prater' had better by half see if they can't find a little somethin' noble about you."

"What did they say ?"

"Precious little worth the repeatin', hang 'em ! But it appears this Bilge calls in at your kitchen on the way to Swindells', to sift that there muddle-headed Trippington, who let out you were shut up close with your missus an' the Castle House people

last night; an' how your missus was doleful-like this mornin'; an' she heard her talkin' low in her dressing-room to Miss Clara, when Trippington was in the bed-room near, an' Miss Clara was pleadin' for me an' the boy, an' your missus said she was disgusted, an' felt minded to persuade you to cut her off with five shillings; an' Miss Clara said she should like a little to help me an' George now, better 'an a lot hereafter; an' your missus told her to leave the room in such a voice, Trippington said, that she believed if she'd ha' bin younger she'd ha' took her by the ear; an' then Trippington went on to say how your missus was down in the kitchen next minnit, an' was goin' on about more stricter economy, an' that like, even in the breakfast coffee; an' then she talk' o' lowerin' the wages, 'An', says she, 'there's bin too much bread eat i' the kitchen o' late, an' if your appetites are going on like that,' she

says, 'you'd better hand me a pair of boots a-piece, or a bit o' clothin', so as we may have somethin' to show if we have to call our creditors together.' Well, sir, these folk fell to abusin' your missus pretty loud, an' Swindell say to his wife, 'I've served her faithful for a sort o' years, now, for small pay, so far as her part o' the work go, an' though the Kidds hev give me now an' then a bit o' somethin', she hev never give me nothin' on'y some ordinary stuff for one dress for my wife, an' not a etcetera to make it with.' An' the feller spoke, sir, as if that were out-an'-out meanness; as if he'd hev expected the herbs an' sauce sent with a hare, or a pair o' duck with a pancheon o' peas, or a bit o' pork with a plate o' winter greens; an' his wife agreed that your missus was a close un, but she say, 'If you'd save more we shouldn't want no charity-gifts o' dresses, nor nothin'. Please God to take you,' says she, 'I should

not be the anxious woman I am; but I'm pretty glad I've kep' my own little nest-egg, an' so I shall.' An' then she went on to speak more agen your missus, an' then agen you, an' then I dropped on to her about backbitin', and had a row, an' she said I was a low, bad fellow at heart, though I'd kep' a bit decent o' late, an' the sooner I left the house the better, an' the farther I went the better, an' I'd better go to sea. I said that I didn't know no land-trade, to be sure, but I a'most wished I'd learnt to be a cordwainer, for I might ha' made muzzles for some folks. Then she called me a brute, an' I told her if it wornt for her sex, I'd ha' pulled her nose, an' I was willin' to deal with her husband in the nose-pullin' instead; but Swindell wouldn't come, sir, so I told him I wished him luck with his wife, who cut every woman I knew out of all feather for unloveableness; 'for,' said I, 'she's got a tongue

as sharp as a cutter's prow, and I'd rather kiss a blunderbuss than her.' An' so, sir, this is my last day wi' the Sunrisers."

At this moment Mrs. Oscar marched past the window and cast a careful glance through it. She was taking a little exercise in the garden, after spending the interval since Dr. Staggold's departure in her lumber-room, where she had been fondly fingering her sovereigns, more precious than ever in the face of the recent catastrophe. Seeing that Boulder was with her husband, she retraced her steps to the back-door, and soon after, stalked into his office with an ominous sneer on her face.

"I must say," she exclaimed, abruptly, "that, in my opinion, you scarcely deserve the liberal offer which my husband, who is as good to you as a parson could be, is resolved to make you, and which you have no doubt accepted. I ought to say, the offer

which my husband has been forced, by the unpardonable miscarriages of another, to make you."

"I've just been speakin', ma'am," said Boulder, surlily, "of a woman who's made me open my mind with her unpleasantness. Pray don't you force me to do the like."

"Your ill-manners are out of place here, said Mrs. Oscar, drily. "You ought to show nothing but gratitude here."

"I can't exactly see it," he replied.

"I judge from your face, though I wish to speak prudently, that you have been drinking," said Mrs. Oscar, looking at him keenly. "I should pay little attention to anything you said when sober, but I should say that you are now partly blinded with drink, and cannot see your points."

"You can hardly expect strict logic in this quarter," said Mr. Oscar, mildly. "Boulder

is as absolutely ignorant of the first proposition of Euclid as he is of the speculations of Cardan or Torricelli."

"I don't mean to waste many words on a drunkard," said Mrs. Oscar. "I altogether object to a slipping, staggering, staring, and contemptible drunkard. Nor should I advise you to devote much time to this person, Oscar, if you have made your offer and it has been accepted. He is not a very profitable client, and a solicitor's office is not exactly the sort of place for a man with no money."

"If I'd money," said Boulder, "I should be proud to pay it, seein' as I owe it, to Mr. Ashbocking; but may be I should be timid of bringin' it where you was, ma'am, for fear o' losin' it. There, swaller that!"

"I'm not weak-minded," said Mrs. Oscar, sharply; "and the passing by of an insult is not to me like the swallowing of a ball of

lime. But let me tell you, Boulder, that, though I dare say I have been criticised much, few have made such gross remarks to my face as you have."

"And let me tell you, ma'am," said Boulder, with some vehemence, "that, though my money's gone, it was got fair an' it's gone foul; an' I say that it's ow'n' to me none the less by them as were the frien's o' the man 'as lost it; an' it's mine still, by law."

"What kind of law?—I wish to exercise due restraint—by what law?"

"The law o' right an' wrong!"

"The law of lunacy, I should say!" exclaimed Mrs. Oscar sternly. "But I will waste no more words upon you, even if my husband chooses to do so. I don't wish to make an enemy, even of you, but you and yours have brought sufficient trouble upon this house, and you have reason to be highly gratified at our offer. Why, I may even

argue that I have a right to be mortified that my husband has entrusted so much important business to the son of a man who has been simpleton enough to leave all his money in a bank."

Boulder thought of the sovereigns up the lumber-room chimney, but had sufficient prudence to refrain from making allusion to them.

"Well, I'll get out o' your way an' think over your offer," he said. "I must do my best for the time to come. I ain't one to pick a bad herrin' off a dirt-bin an' grill the bones after I've eat the meat. No, no; when I look into the bottom of a quart-pot, I see a rough'un, but one who's too much of a gentleman to do that, without pretending to be a lady."

"I neither know nor care whether you are making any rude reference to me," said Mrs.

Oscar, turning away; "but I object to have you stare at me as you now do."

"Ah, starin's an insults won't give you such a twinge or achin' as gettin' a penny off you would," said Boulder. "You'll grudge the carryin' out o' this offer, an' that'll go all the more agen the grain wi' me to take it. An' yet it's a comfort to get some real help from you, for, as to your pity, I shouldn't like to trust to it; for I doubt if you'd show much sorrow for your father if he died—though he may be dead for all I know—nor for twenty grandfathers. I don't mean no disrespect; but really it's somethin' to get some help off you, for you're more loth to part from your money than the flesh from an ole fowl!"

Mrs. Oscar turned indignantly to her husband, who intervened. Boulder then made a sort of apology, and the interview ended.

## CHAPTER III.

BOULDER, who was not grossly affected by drink during his interview with Mr. Ashbocking, firmly resolved that he would not distress George by further heating and stupefying himself with strong liquor before dinner. He therefore obtained leave from the town-clerk to return to his lodgings through the garden, and, when he reached his private room, he busied himself forthwith with the packing up of his chattels.

It had long been understood between Mrs. Josham and himself that, if he and George left the Swindells, they should live with her; and, though the frequent calls upon her purse

by an unfortunate sister, Mrs. Garlick, had induced her to exchange her home on the cliff for a cheaper one, adjoining this sister's, in far less pleasant Deadman's Place, this was to be the fisherman's home for the present. He had seen Mrs. Josham early in the day, and had entered into an agreement to take possession of his new quarters that evening.

Boulder worked at his packing till dinner-time, when his son came home.

"I've bin at work, honest, with some of your own spirit, lad," he said. "Don't knock me down wi' sad looks, for heaven's sake! If my face is red, it's from work, an' not from drink. I knew the town was all alive this mornin' with them awful news flyin' about, an' them awful bank-shutters up, so as it stare at you like a hearse, an' I felt twenty times in as many minutes that I should like to take a peep abroad, an' specially that I ought to tell Mrs. Josham o'

what your guv'nor said about me an' her money; for I gave her a hint about the bank when I spoke about the lodgin's this mornin'; but duty said I'd better not start from this here room, an' I obeyed like a man-o'-war's man as I was. I'm sorry I took a little drink this mornin', but the bad news—the downright inky news, broke on me an' stammed me like, an' beat me out o' time and reason — but I'll try an' check myself," he added, doggedly.

The next minute, and before the cold dinner was set on the table, he began, in his impulsive way, to tell George of Mr. Askbocking's offer. "He went pretty straight to the point," he said, at the conclusion, "for a man who'll make nothin' of interruptin' to tell you that a blacksmith's is a loud trade an' a mattress-maker's quite the contrary. Well, George, the deuce of a bad business it is, I know; but what do

you say o' this offer to help us a bit out of it?"

George Hern stooped in silence over the unromantic bread-plate which he was putting on the table, but only for a few moments; then he raised his face and said bravely:

"It forwards the resolution I have already come to, and which I've spoken to you about, father, that it will be better for us to go."

"If it 'll suit you, lad, it shall suit me," said his father, rather eagerly; "though I'm a bit ole now to go so far from home."

"And every mile we go," said George, in tones that told of a slight wavering of his courage, "will add its share of bitterness.—Oh, father, though you know I have not a cold heart, you can't tell the struggle I have had! Well, well; let us cheer up. God will help me to face the stern facts of life!"

"There's a good chance for you in Australy, my boy, the guvnor says," exclaimed Boulder, "though, mind you, he'll be 'nashun sorry to part from you, who he call the good example, and his private man. I know he'd sooner by half part from ole Creaks, spites o' the teeth he've lost in the orfice."

"A former articled clerk of Mr. Ashbocking's—Mr. Herbert Flood—is getting a famous business in Australia, I have heard," said George, but not very cheerfully. "There was a time when I should have been in high glee at the thought of this long journey across the sea. Years ago, when I was more imaginative, and used to sit on the cliff——"

"No more o' that!" cried Boulder, abruptly. "You bring up before my mind the secret reefs o' the South Seas, an' the many hidden rocks that ain't on no chart in the world, an' the Hook of Holland an' Penarth Head,

an' Scorbay Sands, an' the lurchin o' masts, an' the rippin' up o' decks, an' the smashin' o' cutwaters, an' the washin' o' cargers from the holds! We shall soon be off the sea, lad, an' the land in Australy is very like the land here for business and that like. Howsomever, I'm glad to think there may be a little charm to you in the voy'ge. As to the pretty bird you'll leave behind you," he added, kindly, "I'll try an' try to do all I can to make partlys up for her, though you can't never think o' me as I do, an' allays hev done, o' you."

George took his hand and looked at him earnestly.

"Father, I shan't make any sentimental speeches to you, but I trust I shall never forget or undervalue what you have done for me," he said, warmly. "You must consider my position if I seem to do so now. My heart is full—but I will be a man! If I

have been a fool and a madman aiming at too high a joy, and not foreseeing, as I ought to have done, the practical difficulties in my way, still I will be a man!"

"Ay, right it is," said Boulder. "Be a man. O' course, this smash has made your chance wi' the pretty bird still worse, but without that, the missus, who I've had another bit of a flare up with this mornin' (you'll be vexed to hear), she'd never ha' give her leave to it. She's precious bitter agen it, an' that 'ud ha' bin awk'ard, though the gal's a brave un, an' 'ud take a deal o' beatin'. There's one thing more," he added, dropping his voice, "if we'd lost the money, an' there wasn't no offer from the guv'nor like the one he's made, that there Mrs. Swindell downstairs might be sayin' you were a fool not to take her gal with her little portion."

"I would rather think of Miss Ashbocking,

in calm moments than speak of her at such times as these. Let us talk no more of this," said George, in a low, determined tone. "I will tell Mr. Oscar that you will accept his offer gratefully. You and I will go away together, and look at the future as hopefully as we can. What a day this must be for the Kidd Ashbockings!"

"Ay, indeed," said Boulder; "an' the fiddlin' head o' the family deserve it."

Some conversation followed on the closing of the bank and its effect upon the public, which lasted till dinner was over, and George departed for the office, Boulder comforting him with a promise of temperate action and sobriety on his part till they met again.

In the afternoon Boulder finished his packing, and then started off to console Mrs. Josham (for whom he was always careful to proclaim that he possessed friendly but no warmer feelings) with the news of the town-

clerk's offer to secure the repayment of her loan in full.

He did not find her at home, however, when he reached her house, but Mrs. Garlick informed him, from the adjoining doorway, that she might probably be met with at the shop of Mr. Potter Moll, the grocer, which stood in Lame Dog Lane, a link between South Cliff Street and the thoroughfare branching off from the market-place at acute angles with it (to speak roughly), and called North Cliff Street.

In this shop, which, like the Lug-sail Inn, was popular, though of few external pretensions, he found Mrs. Josham, surrounded by other females, two of whom had traces of tears upon their faces, and having beckoned her aside, he told her his news. The pair were closely watched by the lady's friends, for, though Mrs. Josham, albeit a woman, had not revealed her loan to

Boulder, fresh news was expected from the new comer, who was, moreover, a subject of interest as a direfully injured man.

"So your heart's not broke quite, Mr. Boulder?" said Mrs. Poppy the laundress, as Mrs. Josham returned to the shop, and the fisherman lingered near, not knowing exactly where to turn. "I'm wunnerful sorry for you."

"And so we all are," said Mr. Potter Moll, a pale sharp-eyed self-provident man, amid a murmur of sympathy; "for it's cruel aggravatin'. These failures make you feel as if your till was your only safe place for your money, unless you buy a cottage or two, as I've done. For my part, I've kep' clear o' banks for some time."

"And Mr. Kidd such a nice man, and such a knowin' man!" said a beachman's wife.

"Such know' as his is a poor make-amends

for such fiddlin' and messin'!" said Boulder. "I don't want to be backbitin', but every one 'ull be at that to-day, an' the rights of it too partlys, I must say. What's the use o' knowin' how many calves' feet make a gang, an' how many white herrin's make a warp, if you don't know how many pounds you've got to the good? What's the use of knowin' the meanin' o' a tymber o' skins, or a square o' slates, if you don't know, or 'on't act on, the meanin' o' what the Scriptur' say, 'Owe no man anything?' I shouldn't care a sight if I didn't know the difference between a bit o' jargon an' a bit o' gypsum; but I'd like to know I ain't in the debt of any man rightfully, an' that's sayin' somethin' for one who's bin a bit of a drinkin' man an' a free man in his time."

"They say the Admiral disappointed 'em awful," said another woman.

"Right you are," said Boulder. "Nobody

couldn't make nayther outsides nor middles out of him. He didn't do right to speak agen' my boy, as he used to do of late, an' what a mull he made of it all! Livin' on the fat o' the land all his life, an' dyin' as poor as a journeyman tripe-boiler!"

Some uncomplimentary remarks about the deceased Admiral followed, for Heathhammock, as its town-clerk said, was apt to act unconsciously upon the dictum of Le Clerc, and to speak more of truth than of good of the dead.

"But his funeral did a little good in the town, at any rate," said Mr. Potter Moll. "I shouldn't hev minded doin' the undertaking."

"It wouldn't hev been much of a job if Mrs. Oscar had had the management," said a third female.

"Ay, she's a close 'un," said Mr. Moll, thinking of the scales and steelyards; "but

there's one thing to be said ; she ain't likelys to disappoint folks, like Mrs. Gallopper Kidd hev done, about her moneys."

"She ain't no humbug with her closeness, nor nothin' else," said Boulder.

"No," said Mr. Moll; "she ain't like the lady I've heard that extravagant Mrs. Gallopper speak about, that used to keep her wine in the cupboard till folks that came to see her got out of the house, and then say, with smiles, 'So you won't take nothing to-day?' when o' course it was too late for 'em to turn back."

"As to Mrs. Gallopper Kidd," said Mrs. Younghusband, the fish-seller, "I hev'n't no patience with her extravagance, now we know all about the truth. What a sight o' clothes she must hev! Well, great folks are always apt to hev a fall."

"Ay," said Mrs. Poppy; "an' I warrand the losin' of her trinkets an' what not 'ull vex

her heart more 'an the losin' her husband 'ull bring a many a one that can't afford it; an' yet she hev a kind heart, I do believe."

"She hev," said Peggy Nunn. "I wonder where they'll go, an' who'll come to Castle House, an' whether I'll get the charing there still. Well, she've a good heart, an' that's the truth."

"It's the truth," said Boulder, "an' right's right. Let's be careful of over-backbitin' an' foul play, an' let's remember gossipin' an lyin' are often near akin."

"One thing, no one's fonder o' talkin' an' askin' about other folks than she is," said Peggy Nunn.

"Poor thing! what with her father, who she was so proud on, an' what with this here misfortun', she'll hev somethin' to ail for now," said Mrs. Josham; "an' she need keep the green shawl to wrap roun' her an' shrug up in."

"She's a pretty comfortable one in the matter of sorrows, I guess," said Peggy Nunn, "though she's nervous o' danger, an' don't half like her husband's chemicals."

"Well, Mrs. Oscar 'ont like these troubles," said Mrs. Josham, "though, to be sure, they'll make a job for her husband, and that 'ull be some comfort to her."

During the ensuing few minutes which he spent with these gossips in Mr. Moll's shop, Boulder was informed of many results which had already sprung from the recent catastrophe; and before he reached home his stock of information was enriched in other quarters. Mr. Anguish, he was informed, was not very unhappy, thus giving grounds for the presumption that he had "feathered his nest," and the Misses Anguish, to whom Mrs. Kidd had always shown a sort of condescending kindness, appeared to be rather gratified at the thought that the banker's

wife would now be humbled, and would perhaps seek their more intimate acquaintance. But the Anguish family seemed to be the only one to whom Mr. Kidd's failure had not brought grief and disaster. The consumptive Mrs. Pilot Buzzard had declared that her life was shortened, she was sure, by a month at least; and Mrs. Pittock had dolefully asserted that she was sorry an attack of syncope, which prostrated her at the age of fifty-seven—she did not mention the later perilous adventures with the donkey—had not taken her away from a world where misery seemed now to predominate. Mr. Oxburrow had resolved to give up his liberal-spirited visits to the Lugsail Inn, and to postpone *sine die* his long-projected tour in Norway. Mr. Pilot Eastberry had determined to withdraw from a pending engagement to purchase the house he lived in. Mr. Lillycorn, the careful retired barber, had

declined to lend the young milliner, Miss Checketts, the daughter of the stationer, the promised forty pounds on note-of-hand. The Rev. Mr. Snow, the Independent minister, had relinquished all hopes of buying the twenty-guinea sewing-machine, which would have been a blessing to his wife and seven daughters. Mr. Muggs, the harbour-master, had banished the thought of retirement from office, in spite of his infirmities and his propensities to ease, and contemplated a touching petition to the Harbour-Commissioners. Jeremiah Punchard, the Herringmouth carrier, had been groaning over the vision of long-protracted labours for the jaded bodies of himself and his three old horses. Mr. Hayter, the schoolmaster, the successor of Mr. Service, had referred, in ungentle and unscholarly words, in the presence of more than one gossip, to the mean profits of his profession, and especially to the arrangement

he had recently made to take Mr. Bultilude's three sons on ruinously low terms ; while, on the authority of another gossip, it appeared that the usually mild tones of Mr. Tink, the blacksmith, had been exchanged for oaths and lamentations as hard as his anvil-strokes. And Mr. Brown, the lapidary, often called "Good Brown," on account of his benevolent smile, had exhibited that morning, in the market-place, somewhat distorted features, and an expression of bitterness more characteristic of the bad."

The political invectives of Mr. Sileham, the Radical shoemaker, had been more savage than ever at the "Barge," when he took his eleven o'clock glass there ; and, on being asked by Mr. Titchmarsh, the tailor, whether he considered the closing of the bank, as he did most new measures, a reform on the existing order of things, he imperilled a long-standing friendship by calling him a

ninny. Mr. Sparrow, the baker, confectioner, and seedsman, had given one coat of varnish to the board detailing that crushed oats, rice-meal, split beans, and the like, were sold in his shop, and had revoked his order for further repairs to premises sorely in need of them. Mr. Shipmeadow, the loquacious butcher, might be seen by sympathising customers, gloomy and short of speech, turning his eye around with strange lethargy, and making but a sickly effort to insinuate his "chuck bits" into the good opinion of the humbler public. Messrs. Hammer and Mulhollard, the Excise officials, had, in the hearing of their landlady, cursed the hour when they had resolved not to spend the entirety of their salaries in board, lodging, liquor, and tobacco, but to bank a few driblets on a joint account. Mr. Liddimer, a rival grocer, and a bank victim, had informed the fortunate Mr. Peter Moll, in no friendly

tones, that he was led by his smiling face to believe that he wished to insult him; and old Boggis, the odd-job man at the Hanging-Sword, had had a stable-sponge brought into violent contact with his dirty face for asking Hicklewade, the ostler, a fifty pounds depositor, to "treat him to a pint" in honour of his being poor and independent of banks and bankers.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE meeting of creditors was to be held in the coffee-room of the Hanging Sword at five o'clock, and a little before this time, Mr. Oscar Ashbocking, his clerk Mr. Creaks, his cousin and Mr. Anguish, who carried certain books and accounts that might be asked for, entered the hotel. The placid banker certainly wore a troubled look now, though he had endeavoured to fortify himself with port-wine against pallor and nervousness. His son preferred to absent himself from the meeting.

A considerable concourse of people were already grouped round the front entrance to

the hotel, and the bar and tap room were well filled, but no unusual remark was made as our friends passed.

Mrs. Chettleborough, the landlady, a woman whom it was necessary to treat with tact, came forward in a dress of Irish poplin to meet the town-clerk and his party, and ushered them into the coffee-room civilly. She was, however, to use an expression of one of the by-standers, as stiff as a crow in the rain, and the twitching of her lip seemed to portend a storm of words at a very short notice.

"You will have a large gathering here, I expect," said Mr. Oscar mildly.

"No doubt of that," she replied, "but I hope the creditors only, and not the riff-raff loafing outside, for this carpet isn't old enough for thick boots to troop and trample over for fun's sake, and folks seem to think that these sort of panics warrant them in

making a deal of clattering in my passages and taking no notice of the door-mat, as if that were answerable for the losses, and Chettleborough hadn't a small balance in the bank ; and I am thankful enough it was small, for no one struggles harder for our money than we ; not that I'm speaking against you, Mr. Oscar, though I can't quite forgive you for advising us that we had no right to keep those horses of Captain Wagstaff's, which were at livery here, for the payments due for them ; for if that's law, it ain't justice."

"The innkeeper's right of lien does not apply in such a case," said Mr. Oscar.

"Well, law's law, I suppose," said Mrs. Chettleborough, "though I shouldn't like to have their conscience who made it. Then there's one of my men, that industrious Hicklewade, in this scrape for fifty pounds, while your man's wife, Mrs. Swindell, has got her little bit safe in the funds. That's odd.

But I expect a good many poor persons are sufferers."

"I expect that some of the riff-raff to which you referred are interested as Odd-fellows in the money deposited in the bank by the trustees pending investment on mortgage, or in the small fund belonging to the life-brigade, or that belonging to the reading-room committee. But these claims, I shall explain, will all be dicharged in full, as will that of the cricket club."

"That's poor comfort for me," said Mrs. Chettleborough. "It's true the cricket club now and then give me an order for a dinner and a little drink, but the reading-room takes away folks that used to spend their evenings in this house, and as to the brigade, I can't remember much good it's done, and I expect it is about as much use as the bungling old yeomanry, who shot a hole through the sail of a peaceful craft from Beaumaris with

pipe-clay, when they were practising drill near the sea."

"Let us not have any unpleasantness," said Mr. Oscar; "that will be a poor preface to a meeting in which I fear the sentiments of the Amphyctions may not prevail. I should have thought, now, that visitors at a public-house could hardly be too numerous, as they may be all expected to bring grist to the mill."

"Perhaps they do, sir," retorted Mrs. Chettleborough; "and perhaps I should know more of that than you, sir. I have had my spell of hotel troubles, sir—of tricks and wastes of servants (I think I shall get into the habit of blowing them up thoroughly once a week), of fancies and meannesses of customers, of disturbances by drunken persons, and of the insolent discontent of the commercial-room. I know the difference between a pipkin and a porringer, Mr. Ash-

bocking; and I understand the workings of a better public-house than this, and that's saying something. Wasn't I housekeeper at the great Cock and Pye Hotel at Herring-mouth, where we had a deal of company to please, and every New Year's Eve had to cook I don't know how many turkeys, and were at it almost all day, and began grilling the leavings at twelve o'clock at night. And the landlord, Mr. Livermere, made his six thousand pounds at that place, though he died just after he retired inside an omnibus in Pimlico."

"I should be sorry to set up my opinion on the management of hotels in opposition to yours," said Mr. Oscar.

"They're not much in your line, sir, to begin with," said Mrs. Chettleborough; "or, at any rate, you are no tippler, and at public dinners like to have your decanter of toast-and-water brought in. And it might have

been better," she added, turning upon the banker, "if Mr. Kidd, who knew the secret, hadn't always preferred the genuine sherry followed by a good bit of port. No one could call you a publican's friend, Mr. Oscar; and I shall never forget the talking to I got from your good lady (I shouldn't like to be so strong-minded) about the punch, which she said was bad, and made you ill at the last rent-audit dinner of Sir James Addlebanny's tenants. With all respect to her, she could talk nine men and a boy deaf."

"Oblige me by making no reference to Mrs. Ashbocking," said the town-clerk. "As to myself, no one could apply Chaucer's epithet of 'sottid' to me. I am a poor creature with wine. I am not accustomed to take it with my dinner, and am not an eater of dessert. The mention of Atalanta's apples, or of Nesica's African figs, at one time might have raised some agreeable sensa-

tions within me, but they could not now. I can remember when I rather enjoyed an apricot dried according to Raffald's recipe, with a glass of gooseberry vinegar, made as directed by Meg Dods, or even a taste of Amontillado, or a little of Admiral Vernon's beverage—'grog.'"

"Ah, well," said Mrs. Chettleborough, growing more calm, "I should be sorry to have you think me disrespectful, for I am quite aware of the good you can do us by speaking a kind word of us; and though the Trinity Luncheon here don't pay us very well, I shouldn't like to lose the old meeting of the best men in the borough. And it's not the upstairs' company that don't pay, but the other folks the mayor pay for down below, who sit with our policeman Littleboy. There's that old policeman Peacock, and the special constables, and the parish clerk, and the beadle, and the ser-

geant-at-mace, and Swindell, the dog-rapper, and the marsh-man, and the town-crier, and the sluice-man, and the fen-reeve—to see these men eat is something awful; but I must grant they drink enough afterwards to scald a pig, and that's where we get a little profit. Hark," she added, raising her hand; "what a muttering there is outside! You look a little queer, Mr. Kidd?"

"I don't feel wholly and fully comfortable," said the banker, passing his hands uneasily over his bald head; "but I dare say I am troubling myself with unsubstantial visions. I know how to soften iron and steel; so I hope I can in time soften the hearts of these people, whom I have been unfortunate enough to injure."

"I 'm afraid, as every one says now," said Mrs. Chettleborough, "that your 'know' is a funny one."

"I acknowledge this; that, though I

know something of cementation, and can separate gold from gilded silver," said the banker, drawing a deep breath, "I have not known how to extract much gold from my fellow-men."

"Till now," exclaimed the landlady; "and now, those that you ought to enrich you are going to impoverish. If it had been some men, it would have savoured of dishonour; I must say as much as that."

"No doubt my cousin's mishap is a very lamentable one," said Mr. Oscar; "but you will hardly find any taint of dishonour in any action of his. He will suffer as well as the creditors, and may have to sit henceforth 'beside an unambitious hearth;' for he has made up his mind to relinquish everything, even to his wife's lace and Khorassan furs."

"That sounds hard," exclaimed the landlady; "but who can tell how far her ways have helped to bring Mr. Kidd to this pass?

Besides, she can part with a number of things, and yet leave an uncommon good stock of useful 'gowndes,' as the old women say. As to yourself, Mr. Kidd, I guess you never wasted very much on dress. They say one will be ill spoken of, if one's clothes are mended on one's back, but I should think there's not much chance of your's ever wanting to be mended on or off, of your own accord, now."

Here Mr. Chettleborough entered the room, and, stating that it was now five o'olock, asked if the public could be admitted. Mr. Oscar assented, and the landlady withdrew with Mr. Kidd, who was to remain in the hotel that he might appear at the meeting if wanted.

The coffee-room was long and lofty, with a stalwart granite mantelpiece, on which stood a pair of bronze warriors and a spacious looking-glass, topped with a framed panel painting of the arms of the house. A chandelier hung from the ceiling, and there

were gas-brackets on each side of the stove above the bell-handles. The substantial table and its many surrounding chairs, however, were the objects which chiefly engaged the attention of the people, who now flocked in at the door.

There was a decided insufficiency of seats, and many of the creditors had to stand. On the motion of the town-clerk, seconded by Mr. Audrey, the Rector, who was a deposit-creditor for a large amount, Mr. Oxborrow was chosen chairman, and he, having taken his post and a pinch of snuff, at once called upon Mr. Oscar to make his statement.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Oscar, rising, "I will try, in a manner, to imitate Fuller's 'delightful brevity,' and expend as few words as practicable on the painful subject which has brought us together. I judged it best to summon you thus promptly, though (with a glance at Mr. Audrey), as the trans-

lators of the Bible have it, 'in matters of moment a man feareth not the blame of convenient slacknesse;' for I knew that you would all be greatly disturbed till you knew the true shape and state of the calamity which has fallen upon you, and which I regret as deeply as any of you."

"Have you lost as much?" asked a voice from the background, amid cries of "order."

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Oxburrow, rising, "let us not forget ourselves. Let us at least remember the respect due to our worthy town-clerk. Our misfortune must be his also, if not in a greater degree—not to mention a certain recent domestic trouble, of which most of us have heard something."

"I thank you for your kind interposition," said Mr. Oscar, with some feeling. "Mine is not a very delightful task. Neither my reputation nor my purse—and I know the value of money—is likely to gain much by my cousin's

mishap. I will now read his statement of affairs to you, with explanations; and then make a proposition. I neither ask nor expect any show of punctilious courtesy this evening, but I must request you to hear me patiently, and to give me as few samples of the mettle of your indignation as possible. I can understand your feeling, for the making and saving of money is more or less the chief aim of us all."

"Go on, sir, and let's hear the wust!" exclaimed another creditor.

Mr. Oscar proceeded in a business-like manner to read and explain the statement, saying, as he handed it to the chairman:

"You will see that if we deduct a fair percentage from the estimated value of the assets, and particularly from the debts due to the estate, but a poor dividend may be expected. My cousin was greatly disappointed by the state of Admiral Howsegoe's finances,

for he expected substantial help from that source, but, instead, has lost, as you notice, a very appreciable loan. Moreover, he has been somewhat hopeful of the improvement of the town by a railway. Nevertheless, his imprudence cannot be wholly excused. Most assuredly he cannot be congratulated on his 'penetrative wisdom' in his investments, as a banker of the past was by Gay."

A hum of voices had succeeded to the reading of the statement; but silence was restored when shrewd Farmer Tackett, of Southaston, rose, with a loud cough.

He was an elderly man, with short stubborn grey hair, brushed irregularly back from his forehead, close-set eyes, and a heavy upper lip, which seemed well fitted to give round Suffolk emphasis to the often uttered word, "market."

"I s'pose I may address this meetin'," he said, "for, as far's I know, I'm independent

o' every man here. I want to know where the deuce all the money's gone to? Come, Mr. Town-clerk, I'm independent o' you, and that's what a sort o' folks can't say; where's the money gone to?"

"Some of the items I read to you afford significant explanation," answered Mr. Oscar. "The purchase, for instance, of these cottages in your parish from that untruthful Smithers; the purchase of the boat 'Utility,' with which salt-water and time had played sad havoc, as they have done with many a craft since the days of Nicias; the purchase of the bathing-machines, and that of the wretched Manors of Crow's-Kinsnell and Tanner-le-Potts, made without my knowledge, and to which my cousin was tempted by the tolerable bargains I had made in manors. Then, speaking of copyholds, think of the heavy fine imposed upon him in respect of the copyhold property near London,

and formerly Tubby's, which, as mortgagee, he cut up and let out simultaneously to several tenants, without, in any one case, obtaining the license of the lord of the manor. I was not consulted in this case; but all was left to a knowing agent, who was financially a man of straw. Then, consider the many bad overdrawn accounts and loans, and the many unfortunate investments, such as those with the Shallow-water Mining Company, the Trans-Atlantic Quartz-pounding Company, and that other Company for the purchasing and smelting of lead and silver ore—as unprofitable a scheme, on a small scale, as that which undid the late Admiral. Then there was the project for making improved saddleback ovens, and that for the better kippering of salmon. Again, I would refer you to the impolitic advance made on the security of the life-estate of Mr. Robert Smith, a diseased man, before my cousin had

taken the precaution of ascertaining whether any insurance office would grant him a life-policy; and that made to Mrs. Groom, a married woman, on the security of her reversionary interest in personalty under a settlement made before 1857, which, though you might not know the fact, is as unmarketable a security as copyhold timber or the next presentation to a living. Remember, finally, how lavish he was. Some of his gifts would with greater propriety have come from the hand of the Empress of Russia, who gave Suwarrow an estate of seven thousand peasants, or the king of Spain, who roofed the chapel of Santa Maria Maggiore with gold."

"Ay, ay," said the impulsive Boulder, from his station near the door. "It 'ud be a shame to put out o' mind all his kindnesses, for they were plenty to many of us."

"In few words," said Mr. Oscar, "my

cousin, though a man to be respected on many accounts, did not act upon the maxim, 'abundant caution hurts not.' He was, moreover, an unpunctual man, and often neglectful of his business. He would waste his time in such pursuits as the collecting of used stamps from his letter basket, the finding out of the Christian name of a person with whom he had no concern, or of the shortest route to a place which neither he nor any of his acquaintances were likely to visit. I have never viewed these weaknesses with half so serious an eye as I have done during the last few hours."

"Is everything revealed in this statement, sir?" asked Mr. Oxburrow, handing it to the rector. "I remember hearing that, at one time, your cousin had an interest in the East Suffolk Brewery at Raddiston—did he get quit of that, sir, without loss?"

"With but little loss," said Mr. Oscar; "and

I must claim credit for that. This was one of the transactions on which he consulted me, and I therefore took an interest in the brewery, and made inquiries. I soon found that the manager was a reckless debauchee, who neglected his duties, and down whose throat, and that of many a friend, not a little of the good stock descended free of charge. I therefore advised my cousin to withdraw; though my friend, the chairman, will agree with me that the profits of a well-conducted brewery in this fine barley-growing district would amaze the ancient purveyors of Zythum and Curmi."

"Is there anything more of a disastrous character to tell us, sir?" inquired Mr. Audrey.

"Ay, ain't there no more crazy schemes to tell us of?" exclaimed Farmer Tackett. "I've heard that gardener chap, Swindell, say that this here Mr. Kidd's son 'ud laugh

and say (which it ain't no laughin' matter) that his father 'ud one day be tryin' to make teazles into baby's food, or primroses into pie-crust, an' feed hogs on roots o' cyclamen and breasts o' boiled chicken. Perhaps he've tried some o' these things in arnest. But, sartin sure, if he on'y talked o' these things, how that simple lady of his 'ud stare an' wonder!"

"I've heard Storker talk in this odd fashion myself," said Mr. Audrey. "I've heard him say, for instance, that his father might one day set schemes on foot to preserve corpses in ice-cases; to make breezes on calm days with monster steam-fans; and to assuage the terrors of rough seas by digging ten thousand trenches into the land."

"That would be an improvement on the childish project revealed to St. Augustine in his dreams," said Mr. Oscar. "My brother was certainly somewhat of an experimentalist,

and his love of experiments has hardly treated him better than Lord Bacon's did him; but he was not foolish enough to put such strange and grotesque fancies as these into practice. He has, no doubt, wasted a good many hours upon mathematical problems—for John Mole, our Suffolk algebraist, was not more fond of these—and spent a long time once over an imaginary improvement in a fiddle. He had odd ideas about time. I have heard him speak in praise of a friend who had devoted I cannot say how many months to the investigation of certain minute phenomena in the scales of skunks—a man who is said to have remarked that if he could mature a theory drawn from some point of resemblance in the foot-sinews of the pig and the badger he would die happy."

"I should say that the feet o' human bein's, much less o' the beasts that perish, are poor things to talk about along with death," said

George Boulder, in his loud voice; "for that's the startin' point of a journey where feet ain't to no puppose, an', maybe, such a gent as that might find hisself with hoofs an' a tail."

"This here Mr. Kidd's experiments, an' that like, were at our expense," said one of the creditors, with some indignation.

"You're right," said Mr. Tackett; "and that ain't right, say 'tis who will. It's as bad as tastin' another man's food without leave, for to give an opinion to a third person. But why the dickens do we keep chatterin', instead of havin' the lawyer's proposal. Come, sir, out with it."

"Well, gentlemen," said Mr. Oscar. "I propose that the creditors should come to an arrangement without having recourse to the bankruptcy law, which is an unsatisfactory thing to meddle with, as I think my audience will admit, though they cannot expect to

understand it; it certainly not being like the laws of the Medes and Persians, or those of nature, unchangeable; nor, indeed, has it ever been (as were the laws of the Locrians) unchanged for a long period. I propose that you permit my cousin to assign over everything, including Castle House and its contents, to me, either alone or jointly with, say, Mr. Oxburrow, or Mr. Boxford, our worthy auctioneer, borough surveyor, and ground-rent collector."

A murmur of voices followed, till Farmer Tackett once more rose.

"I was hopin'," he said, in a sulky tone, "that you was goin' to offer to make us up a certain sum if the estate turned out to be very bad."

"I think," said Mr. Audrey, "that we can hardly do better than leave everything in Mr. Ashbocking's hands."

"Ay, ay, that's all very well," said the far-

mer doggedly; "but even parsons can't go to twist folks about, for some folks are a'most as difficult to rule as the weather. Why can't Mr. Ashbockin' stump up a fair sum? It 'ont hurt him a sight. I speak plain, for there's a duzzy deep shadder come on my home, and many another man's, through this misfortun'."

"You'd best ask the gentleman's lady for the money," said a voice from the background.

"To be sure," said the farmer. "She ought to help us through; but some folks haant got no more heart than harvest-horns."

"Gentlemen," said the Rector, "we have not met together for a quarrel, any more than for a carousal; but simply to consider, in a serious and business-like spirit, how best to meet an occurrence of gravity to most of us."

"I am far from wishing to curtail liberty of speech, or to interrupt the candid expression

of opinion," said Mr. Oscar firmly; "but I will allow no man to allude disrespectfully to Mrs. Ashbocking."

"Here, here!" said Mr. Oxburrow. "I call you to order, Mr. Tackett."

"I should be wanting in common manliness if I did," continued Mr. Oscar. "You must pardon my attitude, but I cannot estimate at their proper value the benefits she has conferred upon me. I am mainly indebted to her for the habits of promptitude in business which I have acquired, and which would have pleased Goodman, who praised the absence of cobwebs from our law courts. Remember too, Mr. Tackett, that Mrs. Ashbocking is a fellow-sufferer."

"Hardly that, I guess," said the farmer, whose verbosity was ale-inspired. "These sort o' losses don't generally come scot an' lot. I'll be sworn, Mrs. Ashbockin' 's pretty right; an' if not, it wouldn't break her to lose

the vally o' five hunderd beast, fatted on cake and corn, with a proper run on a good ole ewze mash."

"What do you want to bring her name up for?" said Boulder, pushing his way towards Mr. Tackett. "Let the women keep to the women, if they will, which some 'ont, bein' as bad as the ole crows, which arn't content wi' the fields, but will go pryin' about the seaboard with the gulls."

"Where there's anythin' to be got, Mrs. Ashbockin' 's there, an' pickin' pretty close, like the geese on the green," said Farmer Tackett, encouraged by the looks and smiles of some of the creditors, "grabbin' an' grabbin', an' yet wantin' money about as much as a sow want sugar-tongs."

"It seem to me that everybody is a grabber nowadays," said Mr. Sparrow. "For my part, I was wishing the other day that I could petition the houses of Parliament

against shoemakers putting so much paper in their boots and shoes. I don't mean any offence, Mr. Sileham."

"There's a thousand more substantial evils to petition against, without meddling with our trade," said Mr. Sileham, in a surly voice; "and among other things, our own town-council here wants improving, as I often say; and you, as an alderman, may take that home."

"We all know you weren't elected as a councillor, and didn't like being beat," was the response.

"I didn't lose much honour, Mr. Sagacious," said Sileham; "for this is how I see it; there's but a very little in being like you, what I call a Corporation worm."

"I call our town-clerk to witness that I am a worker and a voice in the council," said Mr. Sparrow; "and wherever I speak I carry some weight with me as such."

"You must speak in your private capacity now," said Mr. Oscar, "remembering (as Montesquieu reminds us) that a corporation has not a will till it is assembled—"

"I can get along without being in the council," said Mr. Sileham. "I know the world, and ain't a fool. I have made more than enough to pay my way in Lame-Dog Lane, with no pretensions, and half the name of the last owner of the premises left painted on the walls, though there was a time when I ewe Mr. Kidd twenty pounds, which he lent me, and now he owes me more. It's a queer bit of irony, a rum piece of the farcical, for that impoverished Admiral Howsegoe to talk of the Radicals being, for the most part, 'the rotten in fortune;' but it ain't a wonder to me that the proud should fall; and it's like this along with me, I shouldn't be sorry to see every high-bred idler brought much nearer to the level of the drudge that screens coal-dust."

"I am beginning to hev a poor opinion of you Heathhammock folk," said Mr. Towell, a creditor from the outskirts of Raddiston, circulars having been sent many miles by messengers. "It seem to me that both in an' out o' the Corporation things are done a little queer."

"You're right, friend," said Farmer Tackett, striking the table. "As the deuce 'ud hev it, I wanted bad enough all the ready cash I could gather just now, for I'm likelys to have a loss with my cows, which fare rarely bad. But misfortun's never come single. When you've got a shyin' hoss, there's sure to be lots o' stone-heaps, an' han'-carts. Bother Heathhammock! I wish I'd never seen it."

The two last remarks were received with signs of disapprobation; for though Heathhammock regarded strangers with friendly interest as inhabitants of, and newsbearers

from, the wide world outside the borough, if they attacked it, by word or deed, the latent loyalty of the burgesses sprang to light.

"You must not upbraid us or our ways," said the town-clerk, with a slight smile. "Livy would have found in Heathhammock a good illustration of his dictum that people adhere pertinaciously to old customs——"

"In Heaven's name don't let's hev a hist'ry o' the 'ole place an' every square yard of it," said Mr. Tackett.

"No, no," said Mr. Oscar. "In the first place, I could not, after the manner of many Greek historians, give you a comprehensive account of the natural peculiarities of the place; and though I could quote from Jacob and Lyttleton, and Tooke and Verstegan, on the subject of 'boroughs,' I have sufficient tact to refrain from being an illuminator of the benighted here."

"That's right, an' everywhere else too, in

my hearin', I hope," said the farmer. "So far's I can see, wiseacres are oftentimes addle-brained chaps, an' larnin' ain't no more really wantin' than silver forks. But I s'pose it's right we should hev larned men like you."

"You should hardly called me learned," said Oscar. "My scraps of knowledge are but as torches revealing how much there is yet to explore, showing a sphere as boundless as the land of dreams. How many have smiled at Julius Scaliger for the limit he put to his ignorance!"

"I arn't larned, nor yet don't want to be," said Mr. Tackett; "I'm a pretty good judge o' stock, though never apprenticed to a wholesale butcher, like my neighbo'r Jones. An' I can tell a modern threequarter-load tumbril from an ole-fashioned 'un at a good distance. An' I don't know as I want to know more 'an I do."

"Well, sir," said Mr. Oscar, "perhaps you

will be able to farm profitably without knowing that horses at one time were fed with horse-bread ; and even if you think that Herodias is the name of the father of history, or Nabob that of the leper cured by Elisha, or that the Samnite wars were conducted by the prophet Samuel, or if you confound Vémana with Venema, or Syria with Sirius, whose light takes nine years to reach us, or if you talk of Plato's 'Supposium' to your friends—your ignorance, I daresay and hope, will not deter you from leaving a good round sum to your children."

"A good round sum! That show you know little o' what farmin' is," said Mr. Tackett sarcastically. "Why, sir, a farmer go to bed wi' bad weathers, an' hoss-hoes, an' lever hoss-rakes, an' serpentine harrers, an' roots, an' beasts, an' cake, an' trefoil an' rye-grass, an' grumblin' lab'rers an' dratted thatchers on his mind, an', with all his worry,

is as poor as snow or a curate, an' find it ain't no easy matter to make his pays, come Michaelmas or our Lady."

"And yet you had a little nest-egg in the bank, Mr. Farmer," said the chairman.

"Ay, an' why? 'Cause I don't play the gentleman. My father used to say, 'Don't you be grand, boy, and keep a four-wheeler,' said he, 'for the proverbs say, "Two extry wheels, two extry cares."' An' I hevn't done it, nor yet kep' fancy cows, nor yet sent out my washin', nor had a lady-wife, nor wore a black coat, nor put bandages on my hoss's legs to make 'em look neat, nor tied him up in the stable for fear he brush his tail agen the wall, nor yet, like some farmers, chattered about the doinses o' Europe at market. If I'd done these things, I should ha' bin apologisin' in the banker's sweatin'-room afore to-day."

"I hope there's a brighter time for farmers

in the near future," said Mr. Oscar; "but though we certainly see traces, here and there, of liberal application of capital, skillful irrigation, good tillage and pasturage, and roadways—many by-roads being equal to some of the ancient 'fosseways'—and a general improvement of agriculture which would have gladdened the heart of Tusser, my cousin thinks that a good many of the farms in this neighbourhood are not treated fairly—but I ought not to quote him perhaps."

"Let him say what he like," said Mr. Tackett; "the land 'ont keep a man in brown bread. Nothin' on'y stock 'ill pay."

"You would almost wish then," said Mr. Oscar, "that, like the Kirghiz race, your property consisted solely of flocks and herds and pasture for them?"

"Pray let's go back to the business of the meetin'!" said one of the creditors impatiently.

"Mr. Towell and Mr. Tackett are responsible for the digression," said Mr. Audrey, "which originated in their attack upon Heathhammock."

"Let 'em say what they like of Heathhammock," said Mr. Codd, the net-maker; "but one man however, an' that's myself, can make nets such as few inland folk can make 'em, for I can make 'em for sea an' land. Few folks know more o' the ins an' outs o' string-back twine or otherwise, an' few've put together more nets, from fish-nets of all kinds, to deer-nets for the Irish gentry, an' cabbage-nets at three halfpence a net. But I don't tell an' talk about my secrets, for, as Mr. Storker once said to me, a physician charge as much for his words as a surgeon for his physic an' his operations."

"Gentlemen," said the chairman, "let us keep to the central point. Mr. Ashbocking has suggested an assignment of his cousin's

property to himself, either alone or jointly with myself or Mr. Boxford. For my own part, I should prefer that Mr. Boxford should be selected as co-assignee, if any. I will add that I, like our rector, should be content to leave everything to Mr. Ashbocking himself, of whose high character and sound business capacity we have most of us had ample proof. We can't blame him in respect to this misfortune, with which it must be somewhat painful to him to have the good name of Ashbocking connected. He is not responsible for the faults of his relatives."

"You're right, sir," said Mr. Shipmeadow, the butcher, "an' if he's hit hard, so much the worse for the other. I haven't much patience with him, for his doinses don't seem straight. Confound it all, a hard buyer's apt to get poor meat; but any slaughterhouse reffuss is good enough for a man that ain't straight. I don't wish to hurt the feelin's of nobody

here; but my little 'uns at home 'ill hev a hard rub losin' my honest earnin's. Besides, I appear for Miss Powditch, an' she's a female; an' though some call her 'Miss Trash,' because there's some bit o' trash in her bazaar, yet she work hard for her livin'. As to Mr. Kidd, he've paid me some little, to be sure, off an' on; but what's the use o' that, if I'm to lose my profit on that an' more too?"

"An' what's the use of all he've told me about the make o' the bellows an' the operations o' the blast-furnaces an' the flux an' reflux o' the atmosphere?" said another.

"No more use than the things he've told me," said the butcher, "and they were not a few. I've heard him correct a lady neat enough, who talked about a five pound weight in my shop; an' I've heard him talk wunnerful wise o' the effect a lot o' new gold

mines, if discovered, 'ud have on trade. But in his own money matters he was as holler as he was awk'ard in his walk. This is a nasty blow for me, an' I half wish I was a pig, for they never look shabby-dressed, like a poor man has to do. It 'ud ha' bin different if I was like my poor gran'father, who was a downright lazy man, as 'ud lay down in the road an' let the carriages drive round him rather than get up in a hurry."

"Life's a struggle with me, gentlemen," said Mr. Hayter, the schoolmaster; "and though my claim is not a very large one, I am anxious to save as much of my money as possible; I therefore propose that we should take a little time to consider what is best to be done."

But as this rather sensible proposition was only seconded by a creditor of no position, and without any of the reputation that may

be gained by habitual self-assertion, it received little attention. The body of the creditors wished for no delay.

"I think my plan will operate to the general good," said Mr. Oscar. "I don't simply make an appeal *ad misericordiam.* As to my co-assignee, if any, you all know Mr. Oxburrow. If you act on his suggestion and select Mr. Boxford, with whom, as a public man, you are perhaps still better acquainted, I can only say I shall be happy to act with him. He and I don't quite agree as to the cases in which an auctioneer's bought-in commission should be charged, but I could give him a good testimonial, as no doubt would the Poor-law, Tithe, Commons Inclosure, and Woods and Forests Commissioners, for whom he has respectively acted as surveyor."

After a short consultation with those immediately surrounding him, Mr. Oxburrow

requested Mr. Oscar to withdraw, and during his absence, after his cousin's faults had been discussed with much emphasis and open-heartedness, it was resolved that an assignment of the debtor's property to the town-clerk and Mr. Boxford should be carried out forthwith.

## CHAPTER V.

After the meeting of creditors, Boulder stoutly restrained himself from taking excessive refreshment. But as he walked to his new lodgings, rather exercised in spirit by a question which had presented itself prominently of late, viz., how would George settle in this more humble and less pleasant home, he was not in a calm and settled state.

"But there ain't no great need to plague about that," he thought, as he turned into Deadman's Place, "for it 'ull be for on'y a very little time, an' I'll keep plenty o' tobacco goin', an' that he like; an' he'll be

able to wash off anything that ain't ezackly pure in this place with a good breezy voy'ge across the sea."

Deadman's Place was a narrow lane stretching northward out of Ashbocking Street; and near the mouth of an alley branching out of this lane, and called St. Catharine's Wheel Alley, or more commonly, Cat-in-the-wheel Alley, lived Mrs. Josham and Mrs. Garlick. It was well for Deadman's Place and its alleys that they formed part of a town on the ocean's edge, with no rising ground to shut off the refreshing east-winds, for breathing space seemed sadly grudged among their dingy dwellings. These were peopled for the most part with inmates who knew how to sigh at the thought of high prices for flour and winter-fuel, and also with such doubtful characters as might be in the town. Indeed, there was a saying, that to be born in a Deadman's Place alley was a

first step towards perdition. Certainly, grim bestial men, and scolding sluttish women, and ill-clad, ill-trained children could at times be seen about these alleys, and more of the inharmonious than of the pleasant tones of the machinery of life could be heard there. But let us rather think of the saying of Mrs. Swidger (a cousin of Mrs. Josham and Mrs. Garlick), "Good hearts have growed in uglier places, thank the Lord, though few."

Boulder was not unfamiliar with this place, but now between himself and it stood the son of whom he was so proud, and it was with a look of discontent that he marched to Mrs. Josham's house. This, however, was a neat and clean one, though in the alley close at hand could be seen brown ceilings and filthy thresholds, and window-breaches plugged with rag and paper scraps.

Upon Mrs. Garlick's door-step stood a thin little girl, with bare arms, and shoulders that

peeped and slipped timorously out of an old brown frock. She was scraping the ground with her feet, and singing in a very poor voice to a still smaller boy upon her knee, who was staring straight before him, with eyes as happy and glowing as they could have been had he been listening to more exalted strains. The disorder of his bright curls did not take away their beauty, for nothing could do that; but the sore on the lip, and the shabby clothes, were sad to see.

Mrs. Josham came to the door to admit him when he knocked.

"You won't find your son in your room, Mr. Boulder," she said. "He came home an hour ago, an' ate a couple of biscuits."

"It show his state o' mind, poor young man," said Mrs. Swidger, from the interior of her cousin's room, "bein' one that could eat a young donkey, with the wool on it, an' a skep o' greens."

"And then he went back to the orfice," continued Mrs. Josham. "He said Mr. Kidd's affairs had thrown the other work behind, and he was wantin' for an hour or two this evenin'."

"Devil take the wantin' (though I beg pardon for the word)," exclaimed Boulder. "I should hev liked some talk with him to-night in especial. I've bin longin' for it all day."

"Come in an' hev some talk with us," said Mrs. Swidger. "It ain't often I go out o' the ole house, which is like my home and country to me, for all my missus' strong mind, an' her scoldin', an' no companion but that Emmer Trippin'ton."

"Yes, come in," said Mrs. Josham, "an' tell us about the meetin', an' hev a little cheerin' talk with my cousin and my sister, while you drink your tea. I've kep' the water hot, an' the tea-things on, o' purpose."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Boulder, walking into his landlady's room. "I'll sit down for a bit, and then I'll take a little walk; for I kep' out o' the town all the mornin', so I think I desarve the afternoon an' evenin' in such times as these when all's upside down."

Mrs. Josham's two visitors were seated on a worn, straw-stuffed sofa, and Boulder thought, as he gazed at them, that their cheering powers were questionable. The croaking, sallow, and thin-lipped Mrs. Swidger looked very sour and doleful, and the silent Mrs. Garlick was depressingly pale of complexion, and thin of feature, with the impress of much sorrow on her countenance, though a certain dull, listless air seemed to hint at the possession of power to pass by many a sorrow, pretty calmly too.

"Don't you think you'd be happier here than goin' out to-night, Mr. Boulder?" said Mrs. Josham, handing him a tempting cup of

tea. "I promised your son I'd try an' persuade you to keep here till he came home."

"I'll be home afore him," said Boulder; "but I'd like to hear somethin' o' the goin's on. These excitin' times get hold o' me tremendous. Besides—I 'ont say I've lost ballast an' compass—but I seem light, an' bound on a rum voy'ge, after the steady one I've been on for many years."

"An' well, too," said Mrs. Swidger; "an' I hope you 'ont break down now, that's all. God help you!"

"Your son was very anxious about you, I could tell by his face," said Mrs. Josham.

"Ay, that's the truth," said Mrs. Swidger; "but, as I said, no excitement, in my belief, 'ud make you like liquor better 'an your own son, after all you said an' done; or if it did, I'd be ashamed of you, for he's a good son; an', as I said to that there timid Trippington the other day—'Young woman,' I said

(which she's no chicken, naythe), 'he's a good young man,' I said, 'too good for you, though not good enough for our Miss Clara; an' many,' I said, 'that call theirselves among the high polite, ain't fit to eat his butter-scrapin's.'"

"I'm obliged for any words you may say for him," said Boulder. "I wish I was liker to him; an' it's often I feel ashamed I hevn't profited an' improved more by him."

"There's a many an' a many worse," said Mrs. Swidger; "an', for my cousin Josham's sake, I'm glad you've come to live with her, be it for little or for long; for it's somethin' of an honour, I think, an' if Swindell didn't think so, he's more of a chump than I thought him, spites of all his trouncin' about, an' thinkin' hisself a man of good speech. An' cousin Garlick here is pleased to think you'll live so close, though it's little she have come to cheer her, an' it's more her way

to see such things as a poor fire, an' child'en as cold as rats, or a lot of hungry ones round a table that seldom hev on it so much as a sheep's head, or a pan o' scrags o' meat, or even a poor-man's-cheese, which was made, as they say, when the butter was gallopin' over the hills to market. An' yet, like a true woman, she've a wunnerful eye to pick out a hungry face, an' hev many child'en that are nice child'en, an' not a dainty one among 'em."

"I hevn't much pleasure o' my life besides them," said Mrs. Garlick, whose husband, when he absconded, left her without money, but with six children, a stock of troublous reminiscences, and some even more grim forebodings as to his return, which had induced her to forearm herself with a magistrate's protection-order.

"Ah, her troubles are deep, poor thing, though she don't blab 'em all out, like so

many women do, without thinkin'," said Mrs. Swidger, thrusting her hand under her ancient shawl, with fingers adjusted ready to apply it to her eyes. "God reclaim that faithless man ; an' yet I don't think he'd best be brought back. He was idle to the heart an' bone, though it seem hard to speak so. But I will say, not to make up a story nayther, for it's true, that your son Joe, cousin Garlick, he's a comfort an' help to you; for he wear a sleeve-waskit my own brother wore seven year before him, and the shummaker don't know the looks of his feet, for, besides his twine spinnin' work, he cobble a bit at home. Then there's Anner's a good little baggage ; and, though the rest aint none of 'em big enough to be studs to you, they're promisin', an' there ain't one you'd like to lose ; for I'll never forget how you took on when little Jess died o' the dysentery, when times were at the hardest with you. But,

peace o' conscience! death's a every day visitor nowadays, an' seem to come earlier 'an he used. Poor old Wix was ninety-four when he died o' scurvy in the gums, sudden, an' the neighbours found him layin' in the chimbley-corner, with the grate choked with cinder, an' a broken loaf, an' a pot with half a anchovy in it, on the table; an' poor old Mrs. Pallent was older still when she died o' dropsy, an' weighed tremendous."

"I must hev a little walk, as I said," exclaimed Boulder, rising from the table, after he had finished his tea and given a short account of the meeting of creditors; "but I'll keep myself respectable. If I come home drunk, I desarve to hev a gotch clapped on this ole head, and dangle from the foretop. I must hev a walk, if it's on'y to make myself good tidy tired for my first night in a strange bed."

"That sound queer from one that's passed night after night tossin' about on the sea," said Mrs. Josham.

"Ay, but I'm uneasy to-night, an' that's the truth," said Boulder. "There's bin a whole ocean o' diff'rences rolled between my thoughts, an' feelings, an' that like, since this time last night."

"An' no wonder," said Mrs. Swindell, shaking her head, "for you were proud o' your savin's, an' rightly. An' it's hard that Mr. Kidd, though kind, should lose poor folks' good money; an' it seem right they call him 'crab,' for he've gone a little crooked, God forgive him. An' that awk'ard an' extravagant Mrs. Gallopper, too, if she've wasted an' dressed away other folk's honest gettin's——"

"I hate the thought o' poverty now," said Boulder, sternly; "an' if I hadn't had comfortin' words this mornin', I'd ha' bin pretty

savage now. But I ain't all comforted, for I fare to hev lost much of my independence. Breath o' my body! poverty's bitterer 'an a unripe crab-apple, in a world where money's counted the best o' sweets. Why, I shall hev to borrow some pocket-money o' Mrs. Josham to-night. But I must keep a good heart, an' not give up an' despair as if I was no better 'an a leaf that's plucked off the tree, an' don't care whether it fall into a cess-pool or a lady's hand."

He went up to his bedroom, and soon after returned in an old-fashioned blue coat and a light holland waistcoat. Mrs. Josham then handed him a little money from a store in her tea-caddy.

"Don't you go to the Lug-sail," she said; "that Swindell an' Bilge 'ull be there to-night for sure, an' they'll be talkin' about you, an' there'll be another trouble."

"I don't want no trouble," said Boulder,

in a gruff voice; "but I shan't be kep' from the Lug-sail, nor yet no other place, for fear o' folk's talk—no, nor yet allow 'em to talk about me free gratis, nayther."

In compliance with which sentiments, our pugnacious friend bent his steps at an early stage of his walk in the direction of the Lug-sail inn.

He hesitated outside, however, and, there being but few people in sight, leant against the wall by the side of the tap-room window, with folded arms, and listened attentively—putting Mrs. Josham's prophecy to the test. From the hubbub of voices within, it was evident that the room was well filled, and, for a time, no individual remark could be detected. At length, however, the listener heard the voices of the rival grocers, Mr. Liddimer and Mr. Potter Moll, raised with sufficient vehemence to silence some of the other gossips.

"You sneer an' snarl as if I was responsible for your losses," said Mr. Moll.

"I can't bear that sort of quiet conceit of yours," said Mr. Liddimer.

"I don't want to show you any quiet conceit," retorted Mr. Moll. "Why should you blame me for bein' lucky enough not to hev any money in the bank? I know I've bin a bit fortunate, seein' that I didn't begin to trade with money, like you, but can remember when Mr. Beamish would have looked twice before trustin' me for two hogshead o' sugar."

"Bother your luck and your fortune and your sugar!" said Mr. Liddimer. "I never would carry on a low trade. I never would have my shop a sort of gossip-nest."

"I don't mind a little gossip," said Mr. Moll; "it 'ill pay, if it only lead to the sellin' of one extra flet cheese an hour."

"As to your cheap flet cheeses, of which

you're so proud," said Mr. Liddimer, "I call that a low trade, and one I wouldn't encourage any friend of mine to take up. It's demeaning, that's what it is. If you were to give me one of your flet cheese, I'd put some butter into it, for the poor rogue ought never to have had the butter taken out of it. Why, you might pave Norwich streets with these cheeses, and nothing short of an earthquake would break 'em; and if you were to put one out at night where it could be stolen, you'd very likely have it put back before the morning—as one was once in this county—with a broken bill-hook inside it."

A further confusion of voices followed this remark, and the next distinct utterance was in the tones of Farmer Tackett, who apparently had not resolved to reach home at a very early hour.

"Well, Stodger," he said to the prosy stonemason of that name, "hev you done

your lies for to-night, or hev you got so many big stones on your mind you can't remember the truth o' things ?"

Mr. Stodger's response was inaudible, and the next emphatic remark was made by Mr. Girling, commonly called "Gallon" the plumber and glazier.

"As to Mrs. Oscar's maneness," said this person, "why, maneness where there's a pot o' money I haven't no patience with. Why don't she do up the ole orfus, that 'ill soon be on'y fit for the owls ? For an ole song I'd make it as different as British plate-glass from that there wavy patent-roll."

"Don't go to blame her, for she don't owe no man nothing," said Mr. Brown, the carpenter, with much bitterness in his voice. "I've a rare bill unsettled with that Mr. Kidd, an' I sent him home some eight-tread steps on'y five days ago."

"My case is harder still," said Mr. Bulti-

tude, the chemist. "But when I spoke to the Rector about it just now, he told me to remember that the misery this breaking of the bank will cause to the Kidd Ashbockings is far more than any we creditors can feel. He's a cool fish that, but he pays up, and that's something; for as to that Mr. Mudd, bother him, I wish he'd put a little more stuff out of his pocket into mine, and less out of his jaws into my ears."

"An' so do I," said a voice Boulder did not recognise. "He kep' me waitin' eight month for my money for a pair o' fowls, an' then murmured as how they were n't worth the price, whereby they were good fowls, though not so good, perhaps, as I might ha' sold a better man."

Again the remarks of individuals were merged in the general buzz, till Luke Grindstone's gruff voice made itself heard.

"I'm sorry for my fellow-carrier, Punchard,"

he said, "inasmuch as he hev to work precious hard for his money, perhaps harder 'an me, for I don't say his road's so good as mine; for if it warn't for carryin' Dutch cheeses for the Dutch merchan's at Herrin'mouth, and soap from the soap-boiler's there, where 'ud Punchard h' bin? In the work-hus, may be, or possible at the disposial o' the perlice."

"There'll be a day," said Mr. Sileham, "when carriers, like you and Punchard, are things of the past altogether, and it 'ont be a bad day neither; that's how I see it."

"I don't know so much about that," said Mr. Mumbles, the landlord, who was gradually becoming a Conservative, in the belief that the views of the Liberals in the matter of public-house reform had a tendency to diminish his power of making money. "I ain't so sure o' your changes bein' improvements. I'm with Mr. Grindstone there."

"Come on. I 'm always ready for you in

argument," said Mr. Sileham, in a triumphant voice; and even our friend Swindell don't care to tackle me, though he can do the 'fe-faw-fum' business pretty well. I can argue your head off, anyhow, landlord, in politics and history. I'll bet you can't tell me whether the Navigation Act was a good or a bad thing for the Dutch."

"I don't want none of your arguments," said Mr. Mumbles. "There was a time when I was a bit of a Liberal; but surely a man may alter his opinion."

"Ay," said Mr. Swindell, "you can't argue out o' that, Mr. Sileham. Human weather-cocks are as useful among men, I should say, as the metal ones in the air."

Boulder was beginning to feel weary of his post, and to question within himself whether it would not be wiser for him to abstain from coming in contact with the last speaker, and to move quietly away while he

was still unruffled by any allusion to himself, when his name was pronounced in the tap-room by Amos Splint's high voice:

"It was a joke to see old Boulder this morning," said Splint; "he looked so confused and stunned-like, and had had a glass or two. I didn't see him come out of the governor's room, but, to judge from the missus' face, who had been there with him, they'd had a row."

"My missus don't think he's had a bad time of it," said Mr. Swindell. "Considerin' what a blow he've had, she said he was in rare calm sperrits, an' so I think. Depend on't the guv'nor has shown him some more special favour. He's more lucky than desarvin', an' hev bin ever since the boy George went into your guv'nor's orfus."

"Nobody in the orfice knows what was arranged," said Splint; "but one thing's certain, Boulder hasn't carried out his pay-

ments to the governor, so I guess he's let him off; that's about it."

"I 'ont let him off his bet to me in this here room about 'em!" said Mr. Swindell emphatically.

"He couldn't expect it, not a bit of it," said the smooth voice of Mr. Bilge.

"A blusterin', boastin', bullyin' fellow!" said Mr. Swindell. "An' if the guv'nor hev done this, that, an' the t'other for him, it's favouritism, I say. But if we keep a watch, he'll go wrong agen afore long after this."

"And it's possible the boy may go wrong too," said Mr. Bilge, "an' then I'll be glad he didn't pay his addresses to my sister's daughter, as I one time thought he would."

Boulder waited to hear no more, but marched into the tap-room.

"Hev you anything more to say about me or my son, whose name I ain't goin' to hev mixed up with any such family as you've

just spoke of?" he asked sternly, turning upon Bilge.

"I don't want no piece o' work an' no quarrel, deuce a bit; where's the good?" said Bilge mildly, while the corners of his great mouth descended palpably.

"You don't want to hev your head punched, you mean," said Boulder. "You're a sneak!"

"Sit you down peacefully, mate," said Aaron Varnall, nodding to Boulder. "Let's don't hev a row. There's bin some hard drinkin' to-day, remember."

"A heifer 'll kick sometimes," said Mr. Swindell; but here's one here that's mostlys ready for fight; an' I warn this here intrudin' man to hev a care."

"I don't pay the leas'est regards to your threats in the way o' fear," said Boulder, glaring at him. "Lan'lord, a pint o' gin-an'-beer. If I'm to go to the bad, as these

brother-in-laws say, let me hev a drink first ; though, as to this Bilge, as I said to him before in this here room, he ain't no more clean than a collier ship in his heart, for all his decent outsides. And though he set up for a sort of goody, it ain't so easy to forget the skulkin' chap that used to get the horn-pies' eggs without leave on Dunneburgh flats, an' that used to soak carrots in brandy for ole hares, an' trespass to snare snipes with horse-hair gins i' the dykes, an' turn up fish with ockle inderberry, an' bagged a brace o' teal on a Sunday, so as the gun was heard through the church-orgin, an' sold some turkeys stuffed wi' scraps o' bad pork, an' beat up his master's eggs in his own tea when they was tuppence the egg——"

"Come, come," said Mr. Swindell, "a little's a little, an' much is much, an' a spree's a spree, an' roguery's roguery. My brother-in-law was a ratcatcher at one time, an

they say a ratcatcher ain't no use unless he can steal a trap; but he was never in clink, like some (though fined), an' hevn't got no William Hern's curses on him, an' never killed no Bedinfiel'. An' as to your wife's kin (which you're attackin' mine), if you could boast a wife at all, they were what I call three-parts pirates an' smugglers, an' one part men—chaps that 'ud risk their lives to save yours, an' then pick your pockets!"

"Now *you're* tryin' to raise a quarrel, Mr. Swindell," said Aaron Varnall, deprecatingly.

"An' should know better," said Mr. Mumbles. "You ought to know the humours o' the place. I 'ont hev no speakin' against Mr. Boulder, nor yet his son, to-night."

"I won't have any speakin' against his son," said Amos Splint; "for he's a generous fellow, and can be got to do anything with

a smile and an 'if you please;' and though he's been a favourite, and is called our 'good example,' and he's got before us all, including old Cranks, who, to be sure, has more good intentions than good faculties, he ain't a bit of a humbug, and works like a horse. I'm sorry he's had such a sharp rub or two lately—first, that romance (though it's a rare feather in his cap to get any encouragement from a girl with such a spirit, and such a kind heart, and such a pretty face), and secondly, this loss!"

"Let him look sharp," said Mr. Swindell, shaking his head. "Bilge hev told some of us how Admiral Howsegoe used to prophesy evil of him, very strong, a little before his death was to come upon him, an' some folks think there's nothin' to help prophecies like death, an' may be it was so with him, though his was an insolvent death, and cursedly disappointin' to Bilge."

"The Admiral's prophecies were worth about as much as his property," said Boulder, striving to speak calmly. "What's the value o' prophecies? A man might prophecy that the steamship trade 'ud be a bad thing for England, for all their fourteen knots an hour. If my lad go a mucker, let the best look out for theirselves, for I don't know his equal; an' when the sea's 'afore, it's a poor look out for the land. But don't talk o' my son here, for there be folk here which it's a wonder God A'mighty should make 'em—but, there, He made the dorg-fish!"

"George Hern's a good lad," said Mr. Girling, "a steady chap an' a worker, an' one for Heathhammock to be proud on; an' if he's a little 'uppish, I for one, don't murmur."

"He worn't made to harden his han's an' break his nails over low work," said Boulder. "He's a gentleman by natur'. As to birth,

that don't make a gentleman, no more 'an satin sleeves make a lady."

"You mustn't make too much of him," said Mr. Mumbles, "nor yet expect too much from him; for it's like this here, as they say, a man can't fly nor yet catch pigeons, an' there's reason in roastin' nuts."

"I don't wish to speak agin' the young man," said Bilge, "an' if I've seemed to do so, I hope nobody 'on't take no notice of it; an' as to quarrellin', I haven't got no heart for it."

"Heart!" exclaimed Boulder. "I wish Mrs. Mumbles 'ud take out your heart an' clap it into her oven for a year or two; but she mightn't find no heart at all. I think she'd be as likelys to find a diamond in a village gutter. Skulkers that don't like quarrellin' shouldn't talk agin people behind their backs."

"It's more like skulkin' than fair play to

listen at winders," said Mr. Swindell, with a sneer.

"Your brother-in-law can do that trick pretty well," said Boulder, raising his voice, "an' with honest folk an' his betters. I on'y take such steps when I deal with backbitin' scurrilous chaps. I heven't nothin' to say agin this company, but on'y agin that there Bilge an' Swindell."

"What have you got agin me?" asked Swindell, exchanging his sneer for a scowl, but nevertheless fingering his lip a little nervously. "I ain't afraid o' you, but I've had enough o' you, an' ain't no ways sorry you're goin', for you've of'en bin a thorn in me. An' as to this precious son, as you make so much of, no doubt he's a treasure, but I don't fancy him much. Hang it, I've tried all my life to think a toad's pretty, but he's on'y useful, so your boy's useful, but not the man for my taste, no more 'an he s like

to be for Mrs. Nipper Ashbockin' that he'd like to be his lady mother-in-law."

"Once more, don't you talk about my son here," said Boulder, again speaking with surprising calmness.

"Hear, hear!" said Mr. Bultitude, who, like many others, rather enjoyed a quarrel in which he was not personally involved.

"You talk mighty high for a man that's lost his money," said Mr. Swindell, after a short pause; "so I s'pose you've got some further bit o' favouritism out o' the guv'nor."

"So you expected my manners 'ud be more like them o' the beggin crossin'-sweeper than them o' the paid scavenger, did you?" said Boulder. "As to what the guv'nor said to me, I don't tell no such person as you about it. Another pint here, mate, with double the gin an' half the beer. Don't look scared, I'm calm enough."

"If you've been lucky, Mr. Boulder," said Bilge, "I congratulate you, though you think so poor o' me. If you hadn't ha' bin lucky I'd ha' bin sorry."

"Your sorrow 'ud ha' bin about as true as a pickpocket's at a public fun'ral," said Boulder contemptuously. "Look here, Mr. Sly-hypocrite," he added, once more raising his voice angrily, "I ain't a humbug, no more 'an my son. Show yourself in your true colours, an' talk your nat'ral words, or I'll put you down on your marrer bones before this here company."

"No, no," said Mr. Mumbles, anxiously. "I was sorry to see you come in, Mr. Boulder, for I thought there might be violence. If you can't restrain yourself, I must ask you to retire. See, here's Mr. Splint here—he know the law."

"If you lay a finger on my brother-in-law," said Mr. Swindell, "I'll feel it my

duty to protect him in a way that 'ill be unpleasant to you; for, by Joseph, you're a bully, an' ought to remember that you're an ole man, an' couldn't stand a longish struggle over well."

For an instant Boulder's teeth were seen, and then could be heard to grate behind his moving lips.

"Breath of my body!" he cried, in a tone that made his auditors start, at the same time springing to his feet. "I hardly want you to speak me foul to my face no more; for I must ha' paid you off ole scores to-night, an' nothin' can stop it. You bit o' sluss! if I hev to put up with your insolence I'm low indeed. If I hev to retire, by God! you shall go fust. Stand clear, mates, I think I can get rid o' this chap without no more fuss than a lion 'ud need to get rids of an' insec', though he be fifteen stun o' vulgar an' conceited flesh an' bone. I warrand he'll be

like paper in my hans', a very shiv'ry article, with no more pluck 'an a spink in a cat's claw."

Swindell rose hurriedly, and with no happy expression, moving indeed of his own accord towards the door, which stood open. Before he had reached it, however, the powerful and thoroughly excited fisherman had seized him by the throat, and warding off a scientific blow, propelled him into the passage with such force, that he burst open the door of the kitchen opposite, and staggered against the table. Unfortunately the eyes of his assailant then fell upon a large basin of treacle which stood upon this table, and the next moment the face of the ill-starred and vainly-resisting gardener was very near to it.

"Now, sir," growled Boulder, "I'll give it you hammer-an'-tongs if you show any insubordination or mutiny. Behave proper an'

down with you into the treacle! Your missus is allays in a queer temper when you go home wi' wet things, and take up the fire for a dryin', an' she'll hev somethin' to wash an' dry, too, if you skwiggle like this here!"

This remark was made very indistinctly during a most violent struggle. And soon afterwards there passed up Cliff Street the parish verger, with a very stained and abject aspect, though cursing and threatening with great force and valour. His brother-and-law, heartily thankful that his own body had escaped violent handling, walked by his side with a somewhat sarcastic and malevolent smile.

Boulder followed them at some distance, as far as the Barge inn, where he stopped for rest and further refreshment.

## CHAPTER VI.

TROUBLED with misgivings concerning his father, George Hern set about his work at the office on the evening after the meeting of creditors with even more energy than usual, and at its close, walked towards Deadman's Place with hasty steps. His spirits were, however, anything but buoyant; Mr. Oscar had been too busy to speak to him privately during the day, and of Clara he had not caught a glimpse.

As he passed down Ashbocking Street he met Mrs. Swidger, then returning from her cousin's. She was shambling along with some expedition, for she knew that Mrs.

Oscar would not be gratified by the unusual length of her absence from her kitchen.

George nodded, hoping that she would pass on; but as she paused, he politely inquired after her health.

"Thank you, Mr. George," she said panting, "(though I can't stop now) my breath's as bad's bad, an' the hurryin' make a pain press on my head till it ring like a bargin o' bells, an' my poor dear arms, they're full o' pain. But I ought to be thankful I can get about, wi' chilblains like a raspberry an' hard as pavement, an' I aint' goin' to murmur at my visitations, for who knows they might come wuss, like the plagues of Egyp' an' the locuses, an' them offal frogs an' darkness."

"I won't stop you," said George. "But if you have been to Mrs. Josham's, is my father there?"

"I've bin there, but there you 'ont find

him," she answered. "He started for the Lug Sail, though much against our wishes; but I hope you'll find him right, and I'm sorry for your loss at the bank, Mr. George, an' for the trouble with our Miss Clara, too, for I a'most think you ain't much too bad for her, an' that's sayin' a wunnerful deal. But now it's more unlike than ever you can make things right with her after losin' your moneys, for money's the great thing wi' my missus, an' I've heer'd the master say, that though folks mustn't beat down prices wi' the Moor an' the Turk, she would. But I must be goin', or she'll be givin' it to that poor frightened Trippin'ton, who, to say the truth, never look so contented as when she's readin' of evenins' that there spellin'-book you was so kind as to give her. Good-night."

George bent his steps in the direction of the Lug Sail, but before he had walked many

paces he met Mr. Girling and Mr. Brown, the carpenter, who told him of the assault upon Mr. Swindell.

"Your father's in the Barge," added Mr. Brown, "an' I'd go to him at once, or you'll find him too drunk to tell teak from box-wood, I'll be bound."

With growing anxiety George hastened to the Barge, where he found the life-boat cockswain with his light waistcoat much crumpled and bespattered with treacle, and staring rather disconsolately at his empty pot.

There were several merry-makers in the room, among them Mr. Sileham and Amos Splint, who had followed Boulder from the Lug Sail in the hope of witnessing a little more fun; for being careful drinkers, these two had little fear of being drawn into a quarrel with him.

Directly George made his appearance,

however, Amos Splint slunk out of the room.

"We were just talkin' about you, Mr. George," said Sileham, after a short uneasy silence; "and I was sayin' that your advancement, and that like, were quite in accordance with my views o' the right o' things."

"Thank you," said George; "but will you now lend me the aid of your arguments in getting my father home?"

"I'm lookin' at you, George," said Boulder solemnly, "an' I'll come home with you, that is, leastways, when, as I may say, I've got an' opportunity in me. But I must hev' another drop. I've bin put out o' my breath by my doinses this evenin', for I'm an ole man. But Swindell found me more 'an one too many for him."

"You'll be better without any more to-night," said George, speaking calmly, and

laying his hand on his father's shoulder. "Why give your old enemy—drink—another hold upon you?"

"Eh? Sometimes I think the drink's an enemy, an' then not," said Boulder; "for how can it be an enemy when you can so soon make frien's with it? Besides, when you're ready to fall to cursin', don't it sometimes make you ready to fall to singin'?—an' ain't that the part of a frien'? You must think o' this, lad. You of'en tell me to think o' things, an' I wish you'd made a better man o' me. I must hev another drop, though I can't wunner that this here Oxburrow's beer hev druv Mr. Oxburrow hisself to the Lugsail."

"You're partlys drunk, so I shan't pay no heed to sich a statement," said Mr. Blowers, the landlord; "an' I ain't goin' to quarrel, for I ain't, so to speak, sober myself."

"Drunk? nothin' a bit of it! no such

thing!" exclaimed Boulder, rising and stretching out his open hand as if to offer a wager. "Who dare to say I'm drunk? I think straight, an' see straight, an' stan' straight. When a man roll like a Dutch-lugger, then there's call to think him drunk."

"I aint goin' to quarrel with you," said Mr. Blowers. "I like such company here, whatever Mumbles say. I can't afford to talk agin persons that stand treat round generous, like old times, as you've done to-night. Sit you down agen."

"Father," said George Hern firmly, and linking his arm in Boulder's before he could sit down. "Don't listen to that man."

"Father this and father that, why, you hevn't got no father at all," said Mr. Blowers, in a low surly voice which nevertheless reached the young man's ear. "Why don't you let the man alone? He's comfortable enough here!"

George turned indignantly upon the last speaker, who was a harder drinker than any of his customers, but as he only met the stupid stare of intoxication, he checked the angry words that rose to his lips, and led his father resolutely towards the door, thankful at least, that he had not heard the landlord's muttered taunt.

As they passed "Whoopie Spore," the boisterous pig-dealer, who was very drunk, he stood up as if to stop them, but a thrust from George Hern's vigorous right arm sent him blundering over the nearest chair, accompanying his fall with a loud utterance of the word "Whoopie," which was connected with his name. This obstacle removed, the father and son regained the street.

"We'll go home at once, father," said George. "That light waistcoat wants cleaning, you see."

"It do," said Boulder; "but I ain't drunk

George. If I was drunk I'd be like to swear this here weskit aint light, but brown as mud; an', as to the light on't," he added, lowering his somewhat unsteady head to eye it, "I'd be like to say I must ha' bin among the soap-suds or pitched into ole Croft's limekil'. But I aint drunk, so don't you scold. Better hide up in a stinkin' steamer's screw-alley, that's black as the devil, than be scolded by my own son."

"I shan't scold you."

"That's well; an' I'm right glad you arn't angry, an' that you arn't ashamed to greet me an' to welcome me, an' to take care o' me after what's happened," said Boulder, earnestly. "I can't feel sorry for what I've done to that there Swindell, but yet it may lead to trouble. By God, lad! sometimes I think I desarve certain things that were half flung at me this evenin', an' that I'm really a rogue an' light-fingered, so as there's nothing as

they say too hot nor too heavy for me—an' you know about that there lumber-room."

"Don't think of that," said George, hastily; "put it out of your mind altogether."

"Yes, yes, yes; but am I to be talked agen by a chap like that Swindell?—a chap that don't know the meanin' an' the mystery of a mack'rel-back sky, nor can't tell whether the tide's nearer to high or to low from the break o' the waves about our harbour bar, which harbour, you may tell your guv'nor, ought to be looked to more and more, for it's well-spent money which you give to the dredgers an' the pile-drivers, however much the commissioners may grumble. But I fare melancholy, lad, an' you mustn't talk to me o' cheerin' up. I begin to think my time's done, an' all the good's riddled out o' this mortial frame. I aint fit for much here, nor in no place contagious to it, nor in Australy,

where we're goin'. I'm a muck-worm an' a vagabone. My head seem holler an' dark, like a empty coal-bunker. My han's, which put Swindell to the right about, hevn't strength to pull a beet now; an' my know o' the tides an' the like 'ill grow to be wuss 'an a petrel's, which hevn't no mind under his feathers. We'll get home, lad, an' read the Catechiz, for there aint such a miserable critter as me about."

"Come, father, the gin-and-beer is punishing you," said George. "Cheer up; I'm not too happy myself, and I heard to-day that Mrs. Oscar was half-crazed with head-ache and disappointment. So you're not without companions in sorrow."

"A pest upon that woman, Mrs. Oscar," said Boulder, savagely; "though we shouldn't talk so about our betters. But I'm thinkin' who is my better? One which have bested me? Then that's that there muddlin' Kidd,

who's lost my money, which, if it worn't for your gov'nor's offer, I'd a'most rather ha' bin drowned in a butcher's blood-pit than hev lost. There's precious little good in the world, that's my opinion."

"Your bacchanals have made you short-tempered and exacting," said George; "but one generally finds that the more a drinker neglects his own good, the more he expects others to regard it."

They had by this time reached Deadman's Place, and as they passed the house of Mr. Hicklewade, their conversation was stopped by the loud tones of that ostler, who was carrying on a warm argument with his eldest son, upon whom he certainly appeared to be bestowing anything but a paternal blessing. While they were still within earshot of this altercation they met Mr. Oscar Ashbocking, to the astonishment of his articled-clerk.

"I have been thinking about you a good

deal during the day, Hern," said the town-clerk kindly, but looking warily at the father. "Is all well with you, Boulder?"

"Well it is, sir," said Boulder, firmly, and brushing his son's coat with his hand, as he used to do when he was a boy. "I've partlys made a fool o' myself, sir, this evenin', but you see the boy's stickin' to me, sir."

"Yes, he will stick to you," said Mr. Oscar, following Boulder and Hern into Mrs. Josham's house, and seating himself near the newly arrived bittern. "After the office closed I went into the study, Hern; but, owing partly no doubt, to the excitement and anxiety of the day, I could not settle. I tried a page of 'Hegel on the Mind' and then a bit of 'Newnham on Superstition;' and then I turned to the Mutual Affinities of Organic Beings, but in vain. The fact is, now that I have to face the fact that we are actually going to part, my friend, I don't feel

at all happy. However, I suppose we must carry out our proposition. It is Mrs. Oscar's, upon whose judgment, as you know, I place great reliance (so that indeed there is in all my affairs *divisum imperium*, as we say of the jurisdiction of the Admiralty and the Common Law over the space between high and low water mark). Well, when I could not settle in the study, I thought I would come and have a few words with you; so I sought out Mrs. Josham. But I fear this place is not very congenial to you. There would seem to be a touch of the Augean stable about it to such a lover of fresh air and cleanliness, I think; and to a student, the shouts of Mrs. Garlick's youngsters would be like those of the barbarian foes of Brasidas, 'insupportable to the ear.' I can imagine them swallowing down their tea with precipitation, though with a relish which Vitellius might have envied, and sallying out for a

skirmish under your very window, advancing and retreating with shrill cries, and relieving each other like tirailleurs. One of her boys was fighting outside the door when I called this evening. He told me his name was Walter, but I doubt he doesn't act upon the precept of his great namesake Raleigh, by making the power of rendering others happy the measure of his actions. From within the house, at the same time, came shrill music from the lungs of a child that was left on the floor, and was, like Metanira's, shrieking. This poor deserted Dido, Mrs. Garlick, has no occasion to lament her want of a young Æneas or two to bring their sire to her remembrance. She was pleased to see me, and I to notice a smile on her worn pale face—it was as pleasant a sight as a tender flower on jagged and shattered masonry. I doubt hers has been a hard lot, for I've heard that Garlick, though gifted with the

faculty of speech, often preferred to signify his displeasure by blows and hurlings of garbage, so that (he being a surly fellow) no doubt assaults were as common in this household as stranglings in Turkish history."

"Assaults on a woman no true man can't abide, sir," said Boulder; "but assaults on a man may sometimes be right an' proper. I an' my son, sir, hev bin grossly insulted by Swindell to-night, and I assaulted him; but don't you shake your head, sir: I didn't hurt him—on'y put him in the treacle."

"Oh, Boulder, Boulder," said Mr. Oscar, "when will you learn to control yourself—to abstain from quarrelling in your cups? I trust you will not (to quote from the Second Book of the Maccabees) 'get a stain to your old age and make it abominable.'"

"I'll never put up with insults from Swindell, sir," said Boulder, "an' no man can't make me. You might as well try to make a

meal o' silk-worms' eggs, or a decent machine o' bits o' scrap iron."

"Well, Swindell is not a very civil fellow, I think," said Mr. Oscar. "He is apt to regard privileges as rights. But I think his wife's temper has soured him somewhat. I think he prefers the public-house to his home, and does not return to his hearth with much of the pleasure of the peasant of poetry, after his 'simple day in cheerful labour spent.' How often these muscular men give way altogether to the influences of their gentler wives, as a strong swimmer gives way to soft weeds!"

"Mrs. Swindell aint very gentle, sir," said Boulder; "leastways, there's more noise in her than a little. I don't like to be backbitin', an' I say," he added, raising his wide-a-wake, "hats off when speakin' o' any one belongin' to you, but I can't think, sir, there can't be such scolders as your own missus an' this

here Mrs. Swindell in the stars, or they wouldn't look so peaceful."

Mr. Oscar and George were both pained by this allusion to Mrs. Ashbocking, and the fisherman's recent orgies did not blind his eyes to the revelation of their feelings in their expressions.

"You must excuse me, sir," he said, raising his hat again, "but right's right, an' I spoke my mind. But, as regards Mrs. Swindell, I'm glad my son didn't draw me no nearer to her by keepin' acquaintance wi' Beckey. Her little money wouldn't ha' made up for the ill-convenience, though Swindell didn't marry the mother for nothin' else."

"You think his was merely the meat and wine love of Aristippus for his Lais?" said Mr. Oscar.

"He's an insulting dorg," said Boulder, "an' he talk o' the Admiral's prophesyin'

evil o' George. Do you believe in these here prophesyin's, sir ?"

"Hardly ; though there have been many that do, besides the friends of Tages of Etruria, of the gentle-hearted Amphiarans, and of Vellada, the Bructerian Prophetess."

"I don't and 'ont believe in prophesyin's agen me and my son," said Boulder, emphatically. "The loss of Hole's boat an' then o' my own, an' Mrs. Josham's money's bad (though I'm bound to say you've stood i' the gap like a man, sir), but there's some brightness ahid."

"To be sure," said Mr. Oscar, "the smiling day at the frosty edge of winter, the breezy ripples beautifying the stagnant pool, the sun-light burnishing the shrivelled leaf, the silver cloud peeping through the dark stripped boughs."

"An' a bit of blue sky's the more beautiful for stormy, grey surroundin's," said Boulder,

"an', as George say, I ain't alone in sorrow."

"No, no," said Mr. Oscar, "the merriest pathos-scorner will have his smiles plucked away soon enough."

"An' we'll hev a good an' a safe voy'ge over the sea, for all William Hern's curses, who was drowned off the Dogger Bank. I hope for a good future, not for my own sake so specially as my son's."

"I will do you the credit to say that you have often seemed to think primarily of your son," said Mr. Oscar, "and that is not a boast every parent can make. I think it not impossible, indeed, that some parents would be even jealous at such success as your son has met with—the old brown root, as it were, forgetting that the world may prefer the young green boughs. It's only in plays that the same being can act the parts of Hermione and Perdita."

"It ain't every parent hev such a son, though not without oddities," said Boulder, striking George Hern on the back.

"There's a strong flavour of truth in that, which I freely acknowledge," said the town-clerk.

"A gentleman, sir, I say."

"Dealing with so old a friend in perfect candour," said Mr. Oscar, smiling, "I grant it. A Fortescue or De Montfort could hardly be more worthy of the title."

"There ain't much vulgar about him," continued Boulder, much gratified.

"There is more vulgarity in the sentiments of an idle and stiff-necked Society, which would rate poorly one in his position," said Mr. Oscar. "There is too much of the throwing of the rags of prejudice over the fair colours of life, of the huddling of its paltry wrappings over the face of truth. And now, Hern," he added, turning rather

anxiously towards his shorthand-writer, "what is your opinion of my offer, and your proposed departure from England?"

"I am firmly convinced, sir, that it is right that I should go," answered Hern, with a slight quaver in his voice.

"I am glad to hear that, at least."

"I cast in my lot with my father," continued George, "and with him alone."

"That is well said."

There was a pause, and then the young man continued, speaking quickly: "Ah, sir, it's easy for me now to smile at the thought that there could be a time when I should have looked upon his passionate outbreaks as heroic; but I wish to preserve much of the spirit of that time. I don't wish to judge."

"You would preserve the sympathetic, uncritical admiration of a young son," said Mr. Oscar.

"Yes, sir, as far as I may. Turning from

the dark lines in his history, I would remember all the kindness I have received at my father's hands, all the anxiety I have caused him, and particularly on that day I played truant at Ruddiston, with the terrible result, and the awful thoughts of the night I spent upon the common afterwards."

There was another pause, after which he said, with much feeling :

"My words are but miserable interpreters of my feelings, sir, when I simply add that I have very often of late, in my thoughts, placed my father side by side with another very dear to me ; and I cannot, I cannot unite the two without horrible doubts and fears. All other obstacles but this I think she could over-rule, but this I only can remove, and I refuse."

"I cannot wholly grasp your meaning, Hern," said Mr. Oscar, "but your tone reveals your resolution not to shrink from a

deed of self-sacrifice which, perhaps, in its humble way, is as noble as the ride of Curtius."

"I yield up a prize above all value, sir. I turn from a vision which I have cherished very fondly, and faithfully, and perseveringly."

"I trust that the love has borne good fruit in your heart, which will benefit it throughout your life. The sacrifice, however bitter, will ennoble it, and I will not even say that it might have been well for you, if, like Propertius, you had had a dream to moderate your ambition. There may be a day when you will think with far less sorrow than you now do of the encounter with the Prussian sailors, and the friendship with my daughter which it originated."

"I shall try to cheer him up," said Boulder, "an' p'r'aps it was meant that this here love-matter shouldn't be, for it caused the first

little brush between us that had took place for a long time, an' has caused a brush between you and your missus, an' has made her face more vinegar-like 'an ever. There may be wives enough to be found in Australy, sir."

"My love is not transient, sir," said George calmly. "I shall carry your daughter's looks, her words, her songs, away with me. They will always have a special and a secret place in my remembrance, as will your kindness, sir, for which I thank you heartily."

"You have not been unhappy with me, I believe, Hern," said Mr. Oscar. "You have not considered the 'having a patron' a 'grievous necessity,' as Voltaire puts it in allusion to Tasso. I am thoroughly glad that I have enabled you to leave me pretty well stored with what Burke calls the 'treasures of a virtuous industry.' But I shall miss you very much. My hours in my

study will be less enjoyable, and I fear I shall postpone for a long period the preparation of the original work to which Mrs. Oscar sometimes refers. By the way, before you leave this country I shall pay the expenses of a few days' sojourn for you in our great metropolis, which was a city of mark before Suetonius marched to it. And now, good-night, George Hern. I have not a scintilla of scruple in shaking you by the hand. If we are not equals as I, (trying to look at the essential truth and right of things) am disposed to think we are, at least we are old friends; and even that punctilious gaoler in Picciola allowed that the hand may be given to a friend. Good-night to you both."

Father and son ascended to their narrow double-bedded room, still more ill-fitted than that at Sunrise Lodge, George thought, for his ceremonies on Clara's birthday, and after the young man had read a short hymn, they

stretched themselves upon their mattresses of seaweed.

But not to sleep at once, for in a house hard by two females were abusing one another at a high pitch of voice and with a growing bitterness that could not long be confined to words. Presently, indeed, one of them, with a shriek of abominable fury, darted upon the other, and applied knuckle and nail to her features, fortunately none of the softest, pushed her down to the floor with her head in the grate, dragged her thence by the hair, turned her upon her face, and battered the boards with her forehead.

"This is awful," said Boulder, moving restlessly in his bed, "as though a place that aint too big to swing a cat in was not stiflin' enough, without them sounds an' scufflin's! But I've bin scufflin' myself, so I mustn't say much. But I ain't goin' to be a drunkard, sending you deployin' about the public-

housen after me, shunned by respectable folk, an' half a terror an' half a laughin'-stock to the children. Mr. Oscar spoke kind, lad (curse those shriekin' wenches), and we shall do all right. We shan't come to starvin', lad, or hev to live in such a stiflin' room as this, which aint much better 'an a man's grave, though there be them that hev to live in wuss rooms on straw without no tick to it, an' a door propped up without hingels, an' with never a plate, an' the wust of meat, so as a bit o' tripe-leavin's 'ud be a treat to 'em to swaller—which is more 'an them women desarve for the rest o' their lives, makin' such a devil's-din at this time o' night."

## CHAPTER VII.

When Mrs. Oscar descended to breakfast on the following morning, she presented a countenance more pale and sour than ever, and very soon began complaining.

"I should have thought you had enough, if not too much, reading during the day, Clara," she said to her daughter, "without poring over your books before breakfast, as you were this morning."

"I was only amusing myself by making a prose translation of a little ballad of Reboul's," replied Clara, "and peeping into the 'Pleasures of Hope.'"

"Ah!" said Mr. Oscar, "I can remember

when the spirited lines of that poem had a great charm for me."

"I hope Clara won't imitate you in reading so much," said Mrs. Oscar, sharply. "I shall not approve of the 'culture fever' in her. "She can get on without so much culture if she's prudent."

"No doubt she can get on," said Mr. Oscar. "But as surely as a learned Recluse will enrich his philosophy if, prompted by an ardent spirit of inquiry, he visits and sits down among the Greenlanders, the Papouans, and the Nouers of the White Nile, a man, woman or girl of the world will be the gainer by excursions, as it were, among unknown literature. There is instruction in the newspapers, and sterling grains of truth in the works of Fielding and Molière, ay, and of Sue and Meleager. Reading is the enrichment of the mind—the partridges to the chops of the Duc de Vivonne; and people of

narrow culture are apt to lay down paradoxes rivalling those of the Buddhist Kat Gyur, or to sink into a settled ignorance, equal to that of those (termed by Plato 'void of all philosophy') who believe there is nothing but what they can handle or see."

"Oscar," said Mrs. Ashbocking, laying down her fork, and sternly gazing at him, "let me tell you that, notwithstanding your skill as a lawyer, your prudence and your many practical merits—notwithstanding the successful way in which you manage the mallet-headed corporation of this borough, of which you are the chief, the Lord of the Manor, if I may say so——"

"You may not say so, Mary Ann," said the town-clerk, "for we have no copyhold manor in the borough. Our court-rolls were destroyed in the seventeenth century. But a little piece of the common is copyhold of the Manor of Tainter's Close. Excuse this interruption."

"I was going to say that, notwithstanding your merits, I am getting weary of your learned talk," she said.

"I beg your pardon; it's a deeply rooted habit."

"I am beginning to think it an objectionable one."

"Yet you have often listened patiently to me, and, moreover, have warmly applauded some quotations I have given you, such as Zimmermann's phrase, 'The indolent form no estimate of the value of time;' and Canning's, 'He who has many objects in hand cannot attend properly to the pursuit of any one of them;' and the line, 'Learn to be wise by others' harm,' from the old ballad."

"You overdo me with your quotations."

"Well, I have searched for pithy remarks in the course of my studies as diligently, I believe, as Ceres searched for her daughter. I have tried to furnish my mind and memory

with a zealous care, of which Polybius has set us the example. But perhaps I should thank you for your criticism, Mary Ann. Critics are generally of some service, and I doubt not Calliphon was to Cicero."

"I shall never be able to cure you," said Mrs. Oscar, gloomily; "but I don't wish to have you encourage Clara to the reading of a lot of poetry and romances, such as she was bending over this morning."

"I think you liked to read poetry once, mother?" said Clara, calmly.

"Perhaps I did," was the sharp retort; "but I should have been wiser if I had confined myself to Eliza Acton, even if I read about terrapin and vermicelli soup, neither of which I like. Eliza showed good sense in renouncing poetry for cookery."

"I shall not be very likely to follow some of my father's studies," said Clara. "Such subjects as 'the seat of the soul and its con-

nections with the body,' and 'original sin,' have little attraction for me; and Church history and political ethics would almost make a lunatic of me in a fortnight."

"Poetry is just as poor a thing to waste your time upon," said Mrs. Oscar; "you have to take part in a practical world."

"You speak as if a student or lover of poetry must be an utterly impracticable individual," said Clara, "as if, because he may like to read of diamond spray or the golden dust of blossoming yews, he cannot know the value of money, or because he may speak of marble clouds, he will never have a brick-and-mortar house above his head. Do you think that poets would wish to plant the earth with forests again, that there might be thousands of black nooks and shades and solitary, weedy, whispering haunts to mope and dream in, and a good stock of logs to burn—they being more poetic than scuppets

of coal? Do you think a poet tries to clothe himself with flower-petals, and curses and cries out against machinery? Why, my father was saying a few days ago that Tennyson's description of the May-Queen's gift of garden-tools to her sister was of practical benefit to him, by reminding him, to refresh his memory on the points of distinction between a legacy and a donatio something."

"Your father is a peculiar man," said Mrs. Oscar, "and would make an argument out of the chirp of a whinchat. I say, teach young people to rule a kitchen; to take Swidgers to task, who go out for a few minutes and stay an hour—managing, however, you may be sure, to get in to supper; to see that floors, furniture, and sheets are clean; to dress plainly and economically; to make bread-stuffs and pudding. A good mess of dough and yeast is a more honourable ornament to your hand and wrist than any jeweller's toys.

That's one of Kidd's remarks; and I have also heard him say that book-learning is no more use for making money than ashes for stuffing birds—not that he has made much money, I grant."

"No, he could hardly have made less," said Mr. Oscar; "if he knew the difference between Zeunius' and Decker's editions of Terence, or could quote the names of the critics who ascribed some of that writer's plays to Lælius and Scipio, and some of those of Euripides to Socrates. He could not have made more unfortunate investments if he could give you a list of the ancient mines that have been discovered by hieroglyphics on the rocks, such as that in the valley of Mukellah. But he would rather read about Mr. Pickwick's antiquarian curiosity. Oyster dredging would interest him far more than what he calls 'the filmy and arrogant sayings of speculative philosophers.'"

"I don't wish to talk about Kidd," said Mrs. Ashbocking; "he calls up a dark picture. I was comforting myself a little in bed last night, though, by the thought that in the several little bargains and exchanges I have made with Bella, I have not been victimised. This is a trifling compensation for the present mortification and many little annoyances in the past, such as the very extravagant roaring fires at Castle House, which used to make me sulky, and sometimes to drive me from the room altogether, and such as Kidd's cool remarks about our viands, till he once called one of our cheeses soapy, and I spoke to him frankly and stopped the nuisance. He may have to eat his sausages without kidneys now, and his bacon without eggs, and to limit the quantity of his dinner-wine and the shortening in his pie-crust. Then there was the gormandising of that Admiral, and his smart and fanciful dressing!"

"He certainly sometimes reminded me of Pollok's allusion to the fine lady who was convinced that 'God had made her greatly out of taste,'" said Mr. Oscar.

"Don't mention him," said Clara abruptly. "I have heard that he persistently prophesied evil of——"

She paused at the name, and at this moment Trippington brought in the morning's letters, one of which Mr. Oscar handed to his wife.

It was a short and business-like epistle from her cousin, a wealthy shipowner at Sunderland, stating that it would give himself and his family pleasure to welcome Clara at once. The mother handed the letter to her daughter with a grim smile.

"Of course, you are still ready to go?" she said.

"I have a question to ask my father before I consent to anything," said Clara, with

unusual calmness. "Has Mr. Boulder's loss caused any change in his arrangements or in George Hern's?"

"I think you should know of the offer I have made them," said Mr. Oscar, "though your mother——"

"Her opinion appears to be getting useless," interposed that lady.

"No, no," said Mr. Oscar; "but your mother does not quite agree with me——"

"I don't wish to have any stress laid upon the matters and the doings of Boulder," said Mrs. Oscar. "I would not have my husband and daughter troubled with them."

"His matters and doings are of great importance to me," said Clara, firmly.

"I am sorry and ashamed to hear you say so!" was her mother's response.

"The simple fact is this," said Mr. Oscar, glancing from one to the other anxiously, and laying aside his own letters; "I have

made arrangements for Boulder and Hern to go to Australia."

"And have they agreed to go?" asked Clara, in a low, quick voice, while first a flush and then a strange paleness overspread her face.

"Listen to me for a moment, Clara," said her father, with nervous abruptness, "while I repeat a few words which George Hern spoke to me last night. I will go straight to the point."

She listened breathlessly, watched by her mother's keen, stern eyes.

"So, you see," said Mr. Oscar, after his repetition of Hern's words, "he is making no little sacrifice; thus proving that he was not altogether unworthy of you, my dear. Let us trust that he will prosper. Now I must go to the office."

"He shall not make the sacrifice!" said Clara, the flush returning to her face.

"Mother, I have been very silent during the last few days, but my thoughts have been busy. I cannot give up my hopes. I will not pretend that it is possible that the visit to Sunderland can loosen my affection or lead me an inch towards the result you desire. You may write to Mr. Warne, and decline his invitation."

Mrs. Oscar threw herself back in her chair and uttered an indistinct irascible sound.

"Father," continued Clara, "I wish to see George Hern and to be guided by him. He must be my ruler. I thank you for the kindness which prompted you to make this offer to his father and to him."

"If you thank him for kindness shown to George Hern," Mrs. Oscar said, or rather gasped, despite her brave effort at self-restraint, "you may thank, and thank, and thank till your face is blue, which would be an improvement on that guilty blush. He

is under deep enough obligation to us all without robbing us of you."

"To my father he is under obligation, indeed," said Clara, fearlessly. "To you not so much, if, indeed, at all. Do not speak against him here."

"My opinion is disregarded," said Mrs. Oscar, with wonderful precision, considering the working of her face; "but I and the world have always thought that your father did infinitely too much for the boy."

"I but developed the capacities of an apt fellow—little more," said Mr. Oscar, soothingly. "Faraday tells us it is more the duty of a parent to cause his child to be taught than to teach himself. I have, in a manner, taken the place of a parent to Hern, and have filled it to the best of my ability."

"You have always made far too much of him," said Mrs. Oscar bitterly, "and now we reap the ruinous reward."

"I always rather admired him, and he has now won my deliberate esteem," said Mr. Oscar, encouraged to sincerity by his daughter's bold opposition to his formidable helpmate. "He has worked and studied with unusual diligence, though an active, vigorous fellow, who used to hurry to his sports like a gadfly—a hero of the play-ground, who might have won the Pythian crown. But at the same time, Clara, my dear, your resolute words this morning have surprised me."

"Surprised!" cried Mrs. Oscar, at length elevating her voice and shuffling her feet with violence. "Who would have thought it possible that things could come to this crisis? Have I been asleep? Have I been altogether off my guard? I begin to think I have. I begin to think the restraint I have so often practised is a mistake when I hear my daughter defy me; that my fear of offend-

ing others is a mere piece of folly when my daughter, without hesitation, offends me so grievously. Girl, is it right to bring this trouble upon me? I am proud of you. I never placed any other girl on the same level with you—but are you going to thrust away my high opinion of you? Are you going to repay me with disobedience and rebellion for all the care I have taken of you? —always getting you private and preliminary introductions to schoolfellows of influence before sending you to a new school—one of the greatest advantages, as you always acknowledged. But it is idle to enumerate such little proofs of affectionate thought. As to George Hern, I tell you this, that just as I would see with approval a poor man ruined by losing a law-suit if it would benefit your father to make a rich one win it, so I would see you released from this young man at any cost to him and any consequence."

"Mother," said Clara, firmly, while she rose and walked to the window, "I cannot reason with you, for you speak and judge from the stand-point of what Mr. Kidd calls 'social humbug.' View George Hern apart from all prejudices, and he no more wants any apology of mine than a baby's face wants a bonnet lined with pink! I have pondered upon my future connection with Boulder, and it does not terrify me. I am right willing to identify myself with all my lover's troubles."

"You have brisk impulses," said Mr. Oscar, "but your mother would prefer a more supine and tractable attitude. You have some of the brave spirit of those heroines of Tegea—Marpessa and Atlanta —or of the Greek diver's daughter, who loosened the Persian ships in the storm off Mount Pelion, or of Artemisia, or Queen Carcas."

"Is that a sensible compliment?" said Mrs. Oscar, sharply, but in a tone more subdued than that of her last remark. "Well, well, I am a nonentity now. Clara has got more and more fond of her books, more and more like you, and she and you will soon know everything, and I, in spite of my mind, which no one can call weak, nothing."

"I know everything!" said Mr. Oscar, with a smile, but still speaking rather nervously. "No, indeed. Why, the doctor —whom I trust you will see once more to-day, for you look very sadly (though neither Rousseau nor Montaigne thought more poorly of the medical profession than you do)—this doctor could puzzle me with questions about the spinal vertebræ, or the nerve currents of the brain, or the papillæ of the tongue, or the eustachian tubes; though I dare say I could, on the other hand, instruct him a little *re* the Druids' belief in the

medicinal virtues of the mistletoe, and Tycho Brahe's specific against epidemics."

"Perhaps, mother," said Clara, after a short silence, during which Mrs. Oscar glared at her favourite chair (for she had one in each sitting-room), "if the doctor could improve your health a little, you would judge me less mercilessly."

"Don't talk to me of the doctor," said Mrs. Oscar, angrily. "What has your father earned of him during the years he has known him? He's agreeable enough, but what—if any question of mine is worth answering now—what is the use of a man who smiles at one, yet never wants any legal help? He might as well tell one to go about one's business, and better, for he takes a fee out of one's pockets. He is as bad as the people who call for subscriptions (except to the breakwater, which may protect one's property). But what's the use of property, if

we are to have misery with our daughter? Indeed, if we lose her, the property may as well follow."

"No, no," said Mr. Oscar; "you wouldn't like to lose our property: to have, for instance, to mortgage the Ashbocking Street Estate. You wouldn't like to hear that I had become reckless, and had purchased some half-a-dozen bibliomaniacs' libraries, or a set of MSS. of about the value of the Gibson, Carew, or Manners-Sutton MSS. You wouldn't like to hear that the profits of legal practitioners were greatly reduced, or that a rival solicitor had set up in Cliff Street."

"Why not the last?" retorted Mrs. Oscar. "As to Storker's carrying on your business, except as Clara's husband, I don't care about the idea. I have not formed my opinion of him," she added, rising, pushing her favourite chair close to the wall, and sitting down in it; "and as to judging you more mercifully, Clara,

I simply ask you one plain question : cannot you perceive the many, many advantages that must follow the carrying out of your parents' wishes, and the reverse side of the question ? You shake your head, but that's a silly movement, for your romantic infatuation has already set your brains cutting capers and dancing reels and rigadoons."

"The ancients thought that love was incompatible with wisdom," said Mr. Oscar, "and we all know Garrick's explanation of Cupid's juvenility."

"Don't talk of love," said Mrs. Oscar. "Think of the irrevocable and fatal step beyond it—marriage! Think of the pain she is laying up in store for herself, and the anxiety—I will say nothing of the probable expense—for her parents. Ill-judged marriages are plentiful enough, though perhaps ill-judged is hardly the right word, for it would be difficult to point out a marriage which is

not ill-judged," she added, with a side-long glance at her husband, "and it is possible that many married men in this borough have seen women they think they would have liked for wives better than their present partners. Oscar," she went on sternly, "it is rather unkind of you to leave me the task of reprimanding and reasoning with our daughter."

Mr. Oscar coughed, but as his wife fixed her eyes upon him, as if expecting him to speak, he said :

"I must confess I think there is some point in what our daughter says. I must admit that I sympathise, in a measure, with her attitude. We should try to place ourselves in her position."

"That of a girl much liked, a girl well spoken of everywhere, notwithstanding her uncommon frankness, throwing herself away ?"

"Let us rather say that of a girl who can meditate, who cannot help thinking that there is a higher standard of judgment than Society's——Mary Ann, we have been young," he added quickly.

"And our parents or our own good sense guarded us against such a gross miscarriage as Clara is about to make."

"Clara may yet alter her opinions, and, if not, let us hope there are bright spots in her horizon."

"Oh, yes," said Clara, advancing to Mrs. Oscar. "Why, mother, will you see only darkness in my future? You speak as if you had never looked at a bright sky beyond a dingy window, or seen the ice melt beneath a cheering sun. You should .forgive me for what you call my degradation, when you know it brings me true happiness."

"There's point in that," said Mr. Oscar.

"Would you not rather see her, as it were, running behind a hoop with a smile than dragged in a chariot in tears, Mary Ann?"

Before Mrs. Oscar could rejoin, Tripping-ton entered to announce that Mr. Swindell was in the kitchen and wished to see the town-clerk immediately on magisterial busi-ness.

"Good gracious," he exclaimed, rising hurriedly and not unwillingly, "I hope he doesn't want to take out a summons against George Boulder for an assault which took place last evening."

## CHAPTER VIII.

On the evening of this day, George Hern, in obedience to a short but earnest letter from Clara Ashbocking, walked once more to the ruin in the grove, to meet her there.

Boulder had indeed been summoned by Swindell to appear before the justices on the following morning; but, as he had been busy inspecting his fishing gear and little properties during the day, and had paid but few and short visits to the public-houses, he was in a fairly sober and settled plight at tea-time. Nevertheless, George was doubtful of the continuance of this happy state of things, and would hardly have been induced to leave

his father by a less seductive temptation than Clara's letter, coupled with a promise from the old seaman that he would keep indoors till his son returned.

When the young man came in sight of the ruin, Clara was standing at the entrance in a mantle of grey tweed and a black felt hat, with a flowing plume as dark, which suited her bright hair well.

The advance of sunny summer could be traced in the deeper, but none the less harmonious, hues of the leaves, and the ground was richly sprinkled with the yellow blossoms of the hawkweed, and white and peach-coloured foxgloves.

Clara carried in her hands a bunch of wild flowers, gathered in a solitary walk that day, woolly, moist marsh-mallows, horn-poppies, yellow-flowered sea-poppies, sea-lavender, blue sea-holly, and pale purple silver sea-pinks, with golden dust and crimson striped

sea-convolvuli, and the red-blooded St. John's wort, and that cheery prophet the yellow pimpernel: a poor nosegay, though prized by him who now received it with a smile.

"They will at least be welcome at Dead-man's Place," said Clara, after they had exchanged a lover's greeting of which Hern seemed half ashamed. "But, George," she added, fixing upon him a kindly pathetic, questioning look, "your face is haggard—a picture, one might say, of weariness, if not desolation of heart; and you press your hand to your side as if in pain!"

"Has Mr. Oscar told you of the few words I spoke to him last night?" George asked in a low, earnest voice.

For a few moments her looks, as she still glanced fixedly at him, were as serious as his; but then a smile broke through them.

"Oh, it is a joy to me to see you smile!" he said, eagerly, "but I have come here to

play the solemn hero. My heart leaps up with hope at that smile—but I am a fool."

"So our horizon is so marred with tossing storm-waves, that you have come to say good-bye for ever?"

"I thought I could have answered 'yes' more calmly. 'Good-bye' is a word I have been practising to pronounce to you. Indeed I must answer 'yes.'"

"But I say 'no'! Whatever the difficulties you conjure up in our path, either when awake or in those dreams of which you have so many, I say emphatically 'no'!"

"You threaten with these few words grand thoughts and resolutions."

"Grand nonsense!"

"No, no. You have not brought the future face to face with you, as I have done of late. I say indeed 'of late,' for, in the past, I have been most foolishly, madly blind, thoughtless, stupid. I see it all now."

"You may bring the future before me, if you like in its ugliest forms."

"You must only let your head take part in the discussion, not your heart: there is so much perilous stuff in that little casket, you know."

"I *will* be guided by my heart," said Clara, firmly.

"You must be guided by stern common-sense, not romantic fancies."

"I decline. Why, my future with you has charms as plain as the beauty of a water-fall. Romantic fancies! Am I to prefer Mr. Audrey's pictures to the few presents you have given me, or to recall Mr. Ormerod's pretty sayings with greater pleasure than these bedroom-ceremonies of yours?"

"Oh, don't speak of any other man! Your love has made me proud! There is much energy left in me yet, though over-

worked, and worn with anxiety. I feel—I feel as if I were the equal of Mr. Audrey or Mr. Ormerod in God's sight, though I cannot endow you with anything!"

"Not even with a little estate, free, as my father says, from judgments, Crown debts, pending suits, and commissions in bankruptcy."

"Yet no man could offer you a love equal to my long cherished love. But why do I speak of it? It has not been disturbed by torturing reactions, sharp pangs of jealousy and suspicion, quarrels and taunts, as that of so many others is; but it is to be foiled and disappointed now. I have enjoyed much of my past happiness in thought and dream. I must enjoy all my future happiness in that poor form."

"But why this excessive morbidness? Is it due to Storker's arrival, my mother's recent irritation (believe me, she loves me truly), to

the collapse of the bank, and your father's consequent loss? Are you awed by Admiral Howsegoe's prophecies?"

"My father's future troubles me indeed, ay, daily more and more. He has been very, very good and faithful to me, and I will be so to him; but I cannot drag you from *your* father's house to share the task with me. Don't smile. There is a new trouble hanging over him at this minute—punishment for violence. There's a spirit of recklessness, desperation, sometimes even savagery in this poor man, which anyone carefully trained (much less you) could hardly comprehend. Do not question me. I can't beguile you as a lover from your father's house, though, if I had to rescue you from it by force, and every door and window was guarded with bayonets, I would enter or die."

"And if I were to sink into the earth, you would plunge down after me in the hope of

saving me, I know," said Clara warmly. "Yet am I to risk nothing for you?"

"I know you are willing. My faith in you is not at all unhinged. But hear me; I do not even ask your permission to my withdrawal from you, nor do I, you may be sure, consult my own wishes. My apprehensions of the future, with you as my wife, do indeed trouble me, but I should hardly force myself to resort to such a torture to still this gentler pain. I obey the voice of duty, as it has made itself heard to me in calm and thoughtful times. My God! I did not think I could have spoken so coldly. I must go away, no matter where. There is but one happy goal on earth for me—where you are. The best place in the world, away from you, can offer me no more comfort than the old saying about the course of true love, though I repeat it twenty times a day. God grant that the loss of you, of your kind and wise

advice, of your sympathetic, hearty shaping-out of my hopes, of your sweet and cheering building up of my future, of your smiles, your gentle guidance to the right—God grant it may not drive me to despair!"

"So that you become a sort of desperate outlaw, and learn what countries have no extradition treaties," she said, with an effort of jocularity, though her mouth and chin trembled. "And now hear me," she continued, taking his hand, and speaking very firmly; "I don't doubt the warmth of your affection, nor do I underrate the sacrifice you propose to make. You have given me this evening an additional proof that there is some nobility among men. Yet, as I have more often met with those to whom high feelings are but casual guests, I value your conduct all the more, and treasure your brave words in my heart with the greater joy. But the sacrifice shall be spared you."

Hern shook his head.

"I say it shall!" she added, with brightening eyes.

"I must not listen to your sweet but dangerous words," he said. "They will be like stars or rosy clouds above the future in its sullen darkness. I will try—I will try hard to act like a man. Who knows but that I may yet, like Zeuxis, die of laughter, though mine would be a rather convulsive gaiety, I fear, and rather funereal merriment. My wounds will not be healed (and, therefore, to be smiled at) for many and many a year. I have tasted of the fruit of the garden of a noble woman's heart, and the intense, overpowering feelings it has raised within me make me shudder at what I must face."

"You shall not face it!" she exclaimed with energy, and tightening her clasp upon his hand. "You are covetous of honour; you are greedy of self-sacrifice. Let me

share a little of it. Devotion is at least within a woman's sphere. But I have no sacrifice to make in joining myself to you. The sacrifice would be to relinquish you. Indeed, I cannot bear the thought of separation from you. Traces of you, when you were far away, would break my heart. I cannot settle down to the world's routine again. I shall go with you, for better or for worse. Your rough but true and manly father's company (with your own) will be more pleasant to me than that of ladies whose thoughts are limited to their dress, or gentlemen whose mustachios are their foremost care. Ah, George, your affection hardly equals mine—which, indeed, you seem to think but folly, and in need of a clog."

"I don't know what to say," said George Hern. "At one moment a great weight seems to be lifted from my heart, a mist to be swept from my thoughts, a glory to break

in upon me, while the happier images of my past float before me ; but, the next moment, buries all in shadow."

" Gruesome man ! to me the future seems brightened with rays of delicious hope ; and, as to its shadows, there is that in me which will enable me to confront them. You shall not turn from me. I will be faithful to you, at all events. I should have been so, I believe, if you had sunk in my esteem instead of rising ; and as to your father's misdoings, they sully you no more than a muddy pond's reflection of its bank-flowers sullies them. Or, if you are to answer for them in any way, why, I will forgive you both, as readily as I would a baby's pink finger-tip for robbing a plum of its bloom. You have yet much to learn of woman's heart. There is no wrong, no taint of guilt in our engagement (that would have spoiled all), and I would not be forced to relinquish it by all the

thunders of the Index of the Church of Rome. My mother says that unless the Queen will authorise good intentions to pass current as coin of the realm, I shall have to keep a humble table with you. Be it so: I will bear anything but estrangement or separation from you, which would make my heart as dull as the earth would be without birds and trees and flowers. I will pay any price for the privilege of living with you, of tuning my nature to such a man's. It is said that the best part of a woman's love is worship, and I believe it."

A few practical remarks followed, the chief result of which was that Clara agreed not to rashly cause offence by declining the proposed visit to Sunderland, and Hern promised not to leave England until after her return.

They walked to the edge of the grove, where a thick fence of tangled privet, white-

thorn, holly, and maple, with strengthening intermixture of sturdy beech and elm, divided it from the common. Beside this fence, amid bracken and king-fern, that reached almost to the knee, they stood, hand in hand, watching the setting sun.

Daggers of ruby flame were glorifying the purple clouds, tinting every filmy thread and scarf and curl of vapour in the west with gold, and transfiguring one mass of sombre grey, far distant from the sun, into a banner with emblazonry of orange and deep rich amber hues. The earth, notwithstanding the many marshes near at hand, breathed an incense as sweet as that of blossoming beans, as if in gratitude for being so magnificently charmed to its rest. A few gnats hummed in the air, and many grasshoppers chirped from the grass, which quivered in a gentle breeze of which the grove trees were giving tuneful notice.

"There is beauty and brightness in the world, you see," said Clara softly.

He did not answer, but drew his arm around her.

The rosy richness sunk to a lower sphere in the sky, and the sun—with a soundless, majestic deliberation worthy of the emulation of his spirit-kinsman, man—seemed to pass away to his grave, while the gorgeous west yielded up its glories, though every cloud clung to them lovingly. The evening grey overwhelmed the thousand pink and violet cloudlets that were stretching and slanting in strangely regular ranks across the sky towards the east, and crept over all things. A little flock of crows, like voyagers seeking a brighter country, sailed swiftly overhead, and a bat flitted out of the grove for his games in the night air.

"But we must think of the lengthening nights, and the low clouds, and the destruc-

tive winds, and the chilly damps, and the falling leaves," said George.

"Let us rather think, my melancholy friend, how beautiful is the peace of the rich, breathing earth," said Clara, "under the influence of Night the Comforter. Without her aid, and however great its wealth of waters, it would soon be a sun-stricken desert. Oh, why should there not be a happy interchange of sunshine and shadow with us?" she added, the tears springing to her eyes.

"Let us trust in God!" said Hern earnestly. "He only knows the gloomy thoughts that have haunted and tormented me."

## CHAPTER IX.

If George Hern could have glanced a little way into his immediate future, the survey would not have dispelled his melancholy feelings.

While he was with Clara in the grove, his father, in spite of his good resolutions, fell to brooding upon his impending trial before the magistrates, from which his attention had been kept by active employment during the day ; and, though his son had told him that the town-clerk had promised to advance the money for the fine that would probably be levied upon him, he felt strongly tempted to relieve his lonely and unpleasant thoughts by

a short conference with Mr. Oscar himself. In his unsettled state, he soon yielded to this desire, and set out briskly, leaving a message with his landlady as to his whereabouts and speedy return.

He found the town-clerk still in his office (for the study seemed to have lost some little of its old charm just now); but he had only heard a few words from him, including references to cocket-bread, the Convention of Closterseven, brachyology, asymptotes, fence-month, and the necessity of looking to all the bearings of an axiom, before the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. Oscar.

The parents were aware of the meeting between their daughter and the fisherman's son, which was then taking place, and Mrs. Oscar made some short but severe comments upon this, and upon Boulder's assault upon her servant, which drew forth some warm rejoinders.

"But I didn't come here to speak to you, ma'am," said Boulder at length. "I say a pigtail for your kind orfices. I shouldn't be none the worse if they were all capsided into bilge water. I come to speak to you, Mr. Oscar. I want you to deal right with me to-morrow, and you was veerin' somewheres near the point when she interrupted. I want your help to-morrow, for, if you're on'y the clerk, we all know the magistrates are often little better 'an noodles without the clerk."

"You think that to their law and dispensations may be applied a certain description of Sir Edward Coke, 'Nothing but a kind of confusion and hotchpot of justice'? I will do what I can for you, Boulder; but I fear you can't escape conviction. No law in the world, I think, from the Hindoo and the Gentoo Law of the Brahmins to the Prussian Law before the framing of the Code Frede-

rique, would justify such an assault. I fear it was a violent one. Some say you made your victim go backward like Mercury's cows. Some say you seized his hair, an offence entailing a fine of fifty scættas under the Anglo-Saxon laws. Others say you grasped him by the throat; if so, I fear the hue of his neck rivalled that of the crimson-throated finch of the Limpopo. But why did you not try to compromise the case out of court? I know that, as Hare says, begging pardon is a kind of begging to which we are most averse, but as, like Teleutias and many another man, you have been led by passion to injudicious action——"

"Of course I can't prevent you from wasting your time," said Mrs. Oscar, tartly; "but I decline to let this man waste it. Leave this house," she added, turning upon Boulder sternly, "and take nothing with you," she muttered with some bitterness.

He heard the words, and heartily wished that the speaker were a man.

"I'd rather take the worst thing you've got than your own shabby self," he said, after a moment's pause, "for your heart's harder 'an Brazil-wood, an' no one could knock a nail into it, much less a kind thought."

"Come, Boulder," said Mr. Oscar, "you seem determined to prove the truth of Goethe's statement, that man's hour on earth is weakness, error, strife. I fear you have been once more venturing too near to that Serbonian bog—drunk. A poet named Ovid tells us that a dissipated life is a kind of death."

"I shall make a point of seeing Archdeacon Parrotts and Dr. Staggold, two of the magistrates who will hear your case to-morrow," said Mrs. Oscar very deliberately, considering the movements of her face, "and shall tell them that if they send you to prison

till you start for Australia, without the option of a fine, they will confer a benefit on your son, as well as on the community at large."

With this she stalked out of the room, and Boulder was persuaded to leave also, though he muttered that he would curse her heartily did he not know that cursing was useless, and that he might as well curse the North Pole.

He went from the house enraged instead of consoled, and easily persuading himself that his feelings should be soothed before he returned home, by a glass of gin-and-beer, he walked to the Lugsail inn. His one glass was followed by two more, though his stay was but a short one and his manner reserved. When he left he strolled to the Common with a thoughtful, determined countenance, and haunted by a dark design.

George Hern had long been home, but Boulder skulked about the border of Mr. Ashbocking's grove in the growing darkness,

hearing indeed, but disregarding, the weird cry of a nightjar among the trees, and the fitful little sounds that break at intervals the solemn hush of night, even when the breeze is still. At length he clambered over the fence, a task of no light nature, passed stealthily through the grove and the garden, and knelt down before the shrub-surrounded window of the lumber-room, with his open knife in his hand.

There was a little light to help him, for, though the moon was very young, no cloud passed near enough to lessen or smear its brightness, and the air was rare.

"If you get me to prison, my lady," he answered, applying his knife-blade skilfully to the lead frame of one of the diamond-panes, "you shall pay a fine yourself. You 'ont miss it, an' if you do you 'ont trace it, Mrs. Brimston' Nipper."

The frame was lifted from its loosened socket, the window unfastened and opened,

and the big fisherman squeezed himself noiselessly into the room.

Advancing at once to the chimney, he struck a match, and held it in his left hand, while with his right he easily drew the bag of money from its ledge, startling from some dark haunt near a little faëry moth which fluttered round his light.

Boulder hesitated before thrusting his hand among the gold, and his light went out. He, however, struck another match, pocketed eleven sovereigns, replaced the bag and then the window-pane, and hurried back through the garden and grove.

He spoke but few words to his son that night when he returned to Deadman's Place, and these were questions about Hern's conversation with Clara Ashbocking. They soon went to bed, and at Boulder's request the prayer from the old book was shortened, and the hymn dispensed with.

In the morning, when George had gone to the office, Boulder gave Mrs. Josham one of his sovereigns, telling her to repay herself the money she had lent him on the previous evening, and to keep the rest on account of her larger debt, which the poor woman would sometimes refer to rather ruefully. The remaining ten pounds he hid away at the bottom of a favourite chest.

At dinner-time, George assured his father, as he had done many times before, that there was little risk of his being sent to prison, if he kept himself under due control, whatever reproof he might receive from the bench. But, alas! the fiery old fisherman's self-control was a thing of the past. He was fast losing his hold upon the good resolutions he had bravely kept so long.

He started in good time for the Town Hall, where the magistrates held their Petty Sessions, and found an unusual concourse of

beachmen and other loungers near the door, when he reached the market place. The old lifeboat-cockswain, that man of strange history and many voyages, had always had friends among the seafaring population, and their number had been increased by his recent misfortunes. Sympathisers at once grouped themselves about him, and no one seemed inclined to speak to Messrs. Swindell and Bilge, who soon afterwards came to the spot.

Boulder's friends insisted upon his taking some refreshment in the bar of the Hanging Sword at their expense, and soon after his return into the market-place, a few encouraging hints from those around him incited him to exchange the scowling looks he now and then directed at his antagonist for words.

"Take care I don't give you a dose o' coal tar or sheep-dippin' next time," he said, in his loud tones, which reached the ears of

Archdeacon Parrotts, who was seated in one of the front rooms in the Hanging Sword, engaged with a luncheon of pickled mackerel and cucumber, which he was eyeing with radiant smiles that were worthy of a subject more sublime.

"Hev a care yourself," said Swindell. "The law's with me. It's no use threatenin'. That's no more use than an old hen's cacklin' over a rotten egg. The law 'ill smash you like a red spider."

"I'd split you amidships for tuppence, if it worn't for the law," said Boulder, scornfully. "You jack puddin', I'd make that face o' yourn as ugly as a braize, an' so as a blenny an' a ruff would be pretty to look at 'sides o' you."

"Let's hev peace here," said Policeman Fiddler, from the Town-Hall doorsteps.

"I'll hev my bit o' law o' you," said Swindell, looking at Boulder with much

dignity, "and I'll hev my bet off o' you, an' afterward, maybe, I'll hev my jeer at you."

"Nayther you nor the law shall stop me altogether from bein' even with you," said Boulder. "I ain't easy bottled up. You may grow Penzance broccolo on the cliff here when you can bottle up your east winds."

"Don't you talk o' garden stuff," said Swindell, with a sneer. "You wouldn't know if your celery, or your savoys, or your parsnips had had a beautiful touch o' frost; you'd likely take wake-robin berries for guelder-rose-berries, because they're both red, an' may both be got in May, an' if you was told to strange-plant your lettuces to a shady place, you'd like enough shove 'em into too much shade, if not into the very roots of a tree, which would be about as wise as smudderin' your young celery wi' soil."

"Don't chatter to me about your garden stuff," retorted Boulder; "you which hardly

know what the fluke of an anchor mean, an' what's the dead recknin' of a vessel, an' what's the trim of a vessel, an' what's the free-board of a vessel, an' what's the main-sheet of a vessel. There's a hundred things on a vessel from keel to crow's-nest that you don't know nothin' about. But vessels are frien's, a sort o' intimate sisters to me, an' I like a ride in 'em better 'an any ole hare like carrots, though I don't talk to my son o' this," he added, lowering his voice instinctively.

This unpleasant passage of words was stopped by the appearance of Archdeacon Parrotts, who marched into the Town Hall, followed, after a few moments' delay, by Dr. Staggold, with whom he entered at once into a conversation about truffled partridges, woodcock gravy, and the covering of Stilton cheeses with sherry-hogsheads; for the good Archdeacon was as indulgent to his appetite as the late Admiral Howsegoe had been to his, and had a

cellar of wine surpassing in value the total assets of almost all his parishioners.

To these two justices in a short time came Mr. Mantle, the mayor, who spent many months of the year in London, where he had a large business as an accountant, but who had come to Heathhammock to preside at the annual Trinity Luncheon, and soon afterwards the clerk entered the room.

"Ah! Ashbocking," said the archdeacon, "Staggold and I have both seen your wife this morning, and she has a notion——"

"Pardon me, sir," said the clerk, hurriedly. "I know what you would say, to my regret. I had hoped that, after some reasoning on my part last night, her notion would, like Ptolemy's cycle, and Hesiod's opinions as to the earth's formation, have been deputed to 'the pensive shades of cold neglect.' Perhaps the defendant is, like the Thebans of old, more remarkable for strength than wit; but

our horticultural friend—whose learning, I dare say, is limited to Mawe, and does not embrace much of Linnæus, Rosseau, or Martyn——"

"We must not justify these assaults," said Mr. Mantle, a small, frail and timid personage. "We must suppress with the arm of the law men who exist to the common danger."

"To be sure," said the archdeacon emphatically, "or we shall have a savage warfare like that of the Pandoors raging all around us. Why, this Boulder could strike a blow which would disturb an elephant's peace of mind, and, as to his temper, I heard him almost challenging the complainant outside the court just now."

The case was heard, Bilge, Mumbles, and Girling having been summoned as witnesses. Practically there was no defence, and the magistrates had no need to retire to consult upon their decision. The only question for

consideration was the degree of punishment, and this seemed to entail only a short whispered conversation. Mr. Mantle then said :

" We are willing to believe that there was a certain amount of provocation in this case, otherwise it would appear to us to be a very gross one. At the same time, seeing that, in addition to certain notorious miscarriages in the past, you have been twice before this court for petty offences, once for breaking a window, and once for firing a gun in the highway, we feel it our duty to punish you with more severity——"

" An' what, sir, is the use o' bringin' up the past about me ?" said Boulder. " I know I hevn't been perfec'—who has ? An' I know I've assaulted the perlice. An' I know your perliceman there, Fiddler, hevn't said much in my favour ; but as to the ole perliceman, Peacock, though Reuben Hern was a thorn

in his side, I once lent him a crown at a pinch. But I'll turn over a new leaf, gentlemen. Men are made for better things than to fight an' struggle like the rav'nus fishes. I hope you'll on'y fine me, and fine me light, gentlemen ; an' may-be the fine 'll be money's worth to me in keepin' me quiet, an' that 'll be satisfactory to all parties."

"It is irregular for you to talk to us now," said Mr. Mantle, curtly. "You had your opportunity."

"I beg your pardon, sir, I don't know your ways well, an' I don't want to know 'em better ; I don't want to come before you : it's a sight more disagreeable for me than for you, I can tell you."

"Be silent, sir," said Archdeacon Parrotts, sternly ; "you are an impertinent man, and I am not sure the magistrates will be justified in limiting your punishment to a fine."

"Will you send me to prison ?" exclaimed

Boulder, with kindling eye. "You parsons tell us our life is for ever an' ever, an' yet are you so ready to let a porltry minnit's mistake lead to a spell o' prison, that may spoil an' ruin once for all this tremendious time an' eternity? Ay, an' you, sir, that sit in judgment on me so stern, once upon a time, I've heard, 'ud gallop home from a sportin' meetin' on a Saturday, near midnight, with devil a bit o' sarmin' ready for the Sunday."

An angry scowl, which Storker Ashbocking afterwards remarked was as gross a disfigurement to a parson as a black eye to a layman, settled on the Archdeacon's face, and another whispered conversation took place between the magistrates. The result was that Mrs. Oscar's advice was acted on, instead of her husband's, in spite of some eager protestations on his part, and Boulder was sentenced to twenty-one days' imprisonment, without the option of a fine.

So, once more the prison door was to separate father and son. There was a sad parting between them, upon which I will not dwell. Boulder cursed himself again and again for his rash words, and asked Hern to recite the Evening Hymn before he left the cell.

And as he grasped his hand, he left his small bunch of keys in his palm.

"You 'll be through your law examination before I come out, lad, an' I'll think about you, you may be sure, an' I'll be countin' o' the time when we'll be crossin' the ole sea together, away from these troubles; you an' me, an' all 'll be well. You'll think o' me as kind as you can, an' forget any little breach that hev bin betwixt us. An' if you want a little money, there's a trifle in my green chest, folded up in the brown jersey near the bottom."

## CHAPTER X.

Two days after Boulder's conviction, Clara Ashbocking was prevailed upon to set out for Sunderland. During these two days her mother had been, in stern reality, confined to her bed, not even paying a visit to her molested sovereigns; but she would on no account consent to her daughter's journey being postponed. Clara did not again encounter George Hern, but she left a kind and encouraging letter of farewell for him.

On the following day he was to start for London, for his examination was held that year at the extreme end of Trinity term.

On the evening preceding his proposed

departure, just after tea and before he settled to his last short spell of study, he packed up the few things he intended to take to London with him, and stowed away the rest of his property in his boxes; but, not finding room for a winter overcoat, he resolved to put it, if possible, in one of his father's chests.

He unlocked and opened the green chest, but was at once arrested by the sight of a piece of paper, on which his father, whom he had taught to read and write in simple fashion, had scribbled these words in pencil:

"Don't you bother about where the money come from—I'll tell all when we're free of this place. If you want it, take it. All right one day."

A painful thrill shot through the young man's frame, and the blood rushed to his face. In a moment the thought flashed across his mind that the money was stolen from Mrs. Ashbocking's store. He found

the brown jersey with the ten sovereigns and the knife folded up in it. The slightly scratched and gapped knife-blade confirmed his grim forebodings.

There was a short pause, during which Hern knelt upon the floor, with his face buried in his hands, and prayed to God for guidance under the shadow of this terrible realisation of his haunting doubts and fears. Then he rose, put the money and knife in his pocket, repacked the chest and locked it, and walked swiftly to the Common.

Rain had fallen lightly, but persistently, during the day, and the evening was cheerless and chilly, with threatening fibrous-edged clouds above, and a mist hovering in the air.

As his father had done but a little time before, Hern clambered over the fence of Mr. Ashbocking's grove, and, hastening into its dusky depths, in which the rain had awakened a rich and wholesome fragrance,

strode past many a familiar and thought-stirring object, thankful for the dulness of the sky, which almost shrouded these that night.

He crossed the silent garden, and, with a step as light of sound as the waving of the ancient larch-tree boughs above, glided in among the shrubs around the window, before which he had once seen his father kneel; and at this he, too, now knelt.

He could feel, and, in the faint light, after much peering, see the lead frame that had been tampered with, and it yielded to the same blade in time. Hern then removed the pane, opened the window, and stood inside the room.

"Thank God! I may yet restore the money and save him," he thought, as he looked eagerly around him.

But, at this moment, a sound startled him. Surely it was the stir of a frightened bird, or the sweeping of the shrubs against the open

window! No, the sound came from the door. It was unlocked and opened, and Mrs. Oscar Ashbocking, light in hand, stepped unsuspectingly over the threshold.

Their eyes met, and she uttered a piercing scream. In his utter bewilderment, Hern dropped the stolen sovereigns on the table, and held out his hand as if to support her; but she rushed from the room, filling the echoing house with her cries.

During the awful time that elapsed before her return, accompanied by her husband and Mr. Kidd, who had been closeted with the town-clerk in his office, explaining his accounts, two pictures passed before George Hern's mind.

One showed his father in his true light, that of a sentenced burglar, against whom past convictions could be brought, and the result, imprisonment till death, for this old man who loved liberty so fervently. The

other showed himself suppressing his knowledge of his father's guilt, and encouraging the suspicion cast upon himself, bearing the far lighter sentence that would be awarded in his own case, and thus repaying in good earnest, and most generously, all his filial debts.

And then came a feeling of horror at his disgrace, the forfeiture of the respect of all, and the certain loss of Clara; but that was followed by the thought (a dismal consolation) that by this deed of self-denial he should free her from the shadow he would surely cast upon her.

"Examination postponed for ever!" then ran his meditations; "and even Australia perhaps shut out from me by the loss of Mr. Oscar's help! But I will face all the terrors courageously! I will bear the burthen! I can't reason upon this act, but my heart tells me it's right, and God will help me."

The sea seemed to moan dolefully, in almost supernatural tones; but the breeze shut the window suddenly with a jarring noise, as Mrs. Oscar and her friends hurried back into the room. As Hern's eye fell upon his master and good friend, his heart sank indeed within him, and yet his hopes did not utterly die. I must in truth confess that, even then, a very vague but comforting thought was floating through his mind, that one day, before his death, the truth might be revealed, and he would gain praise from some for this night's work.

"Explain, explain!" were Mr. Oscar's eager words.

But his clerk, with down-cast eyes and hot cheeks, remained speechless for a few moments. Then, drawing his hat down over his brows, he said, with quivering lips:

"I have nothing to explain, sir. There

seems to be a sad haze upon everything. You had better take your prisoner away."

He would say no more, though he wrote a private letter to his father, which the town-clerk promised to deliver to the latter after his release from prison. Hern was in due course taken to the police cells, but not as a mere visitor now.

The astounded Mr. Oscar's attention was soon afterwards turned in another direction. His wife, who should not have left her bed-room to visit her secret store at all, was taken to it again with her malady much increased.

On the following day the accused was brought before the magistrates on a charge of housebreaking, for his visit to the lumber room, unlike his father's, had been made before nine o'clock. The case lasted but a short time, to the relief of Archdeacon Parrotts, who was a good deal troubled in his mind by two of his finely-bred pigs, which

had evinced symptoms of ill-health that morning. The prisoner pleaded "not guilty," but had nothing to say in his own defence. He was committed for trial at the Quarter Sessions, which would be held at the county-town in a few days.

The grieved and sympathising Mr. Oscar volunteered many remarks in praise of his clerk's character, but it is obvious that the evidence against him, despite Mrs. Oscar's inability to attend, was very strong. I must say, however, that the magistrates committed him reluctantly, and would willingly have accepted bail for his appearance. But he simply said that, if they committed him to gaol at once, his time there would be taken into consideration by the court above in passing sentence, and he should the sooner be at liberty to rejoin his father.

At the close of the case the justice's clerk made a few unofficial remarks to the bench

upon cross (which he told them Cicero calls *ex adverso*) examination, and upon the power of drawing information from the looks as well as from the words of witnesses, which Chy-foo, in the Chinese novel, seems to have possessed; and then Mr. Parrotts rose to depart.

"Such a chatterer!" he said sulkily to Dr. Staggold, when Mr. Oscar was out of earshot. "I wonder he doesn't suggest that we should try to subpœna fish as witnesses at the inquests of drowned men, or even try to find some means of communicating with the deceased themselves."

Dr. Staggold smiled. "Mr. Kidd might be persuaded to start companies to carry out these suggestions," he said, but good-humouredly — for the doctor's large bill against Mrs. Kidd had been paid in full before the closing of the bank.

Before Hern left Heathhammock for the

county-town in the custody of Mr. Fiddler, the town-clerk called upon him. He told him that Mrs. Oscar, speaking of his offence as "disgusting," and "a warning to all silly patrons," had insisted upon the prosecution with an eagerness that almost made her worthy of Lothario's description of the Fair Penitent, "mad as a priestess of the Delphic god;" that she had jeered at him (her husband) in words far more bitter than those of Lillo in the "London Merchant," who said, "You are the master of a villain, which is not much to your credit," and that he (Mr. Oscar) conscious of what Syrus and others had said about the folly and the injustice to the unoffending of extending too much mercy to the offending, and anxious that Latimer's complaint of the corruption of justice in his day should not be made by any one in Heathhammock in these modern times, had, to his intense regret, considered the prosecution un-

avoidable. He further informed his late clerk that the ill-starred store of bullion, except one missing sovereign, which he had prevailed upon his wife to make no mention of, had been deposited with Mr. Anguish, who carried on the banking business temporarily for the assignees, and that Mrs. Oscar proposed that all the important doors of the house should be secured by padlocked bars, and the garden-walls topped with bottle-glass. He further said that she had persuaded Storker to let Moloch take up his abode near the back-door, and had boasted that she should keep him on the alert by often going out suddenly, and making strange noises, or sending the trembling Trippington to do so.

"And speaking of Trippington," said Mr. Oscar, "she sincerely laments your misfortune, and was not a little fearful that she might be called upon to give evidence in

some way against you. I am glad she was not, for she would have made but an indifferent witness, and might have perpetrated some blunder as gross as that of the boy who addressed the county court judge as 'ma'am,' being misled by his wig. But this is no time for levity for you or for me, or for Mrs. Oscar either. There was intense pathos in her tone when she said, 'I know it is a shameful world, where most of the weak and unwary come to harm, but it is unjust and execrable that my poor little treasure should be discovered, and that I should be robbed. I seldom trust man or woman. I keep a careful watch. I won't even leave my books at church, nor have my umbrella out of my reach there. Depend upon it, if this youth is not dealt firmly with, there will be a gang of Boulders and other desperadoes about us robbing and perhaps murdering.' But, my poor Icarus, who have fallen so low," con-

tinued Mr. Oscar, kindly, "whom I at one time hoped to have made my Micithus, and whom I have had as much pleasure in helping as Abenueriz had in adopting Izates, I don't come here to reproach you, or to tell you that under the Fetwahs of Abdurrahim your hand would have been cut off, or that history does not commend the want of good faith, or that I was more wounded by your miscarriage than Raffaelle's friends could have been by Spurzeim's report that his head showed conspicuously the organ of theft; nor did I come to ask you whether the threatened blight upon your future makes it so uninviting to you that you will be almost as reluctant to leave your prison as Philoctetes was to leave his caves and rocks; for, though I could never call you in Parnell's words, 'a fav'rite fool of chance,' I could have applied to you an old writer's description, 'A youth of singular good expectation.'

Such speech would be far less enviable than 'the song that's discord,' according to Moschus.

"I have come to comfort you, if I can; for, by your persistent silence, I am led, indeed, to think you need some consolation—though, remember, we have all our burdens. Selden tells us that pleasure is but the intermission of pain; and Seneca, that laughing is not rejoicing. I will not ask you now as to the phases of feeling you must have passed through before you took this fatal step. Thank God there is more than one wall of warning to overleap between good and utter evil."

"I shall be glad, sir, if you will leave me," said Hern, in low, pleading tones. "One day I may be able to speak to you again: but I cannot now."

"Poor lad," said Mr. Oscar, "I pity you. We are all liable to go astray, as we advance

through this strange and difficult world, of which I sometimes wish I were as ignorant as when I used to shout out our Latin hymn at Rugby. Far be it from me to cast a stone at you. I would rather show you what St. Germain calls 'the sweetness of mercy.' One word more—in spite of your backsliding, I shall still endeavour to befriend you. Good-bye."

## CHAPTER XI.

On the day of Hern's committal for trial we may be sure no small amount of chattering could be heard in Mr. Potter Molls' shop. He acknowledged that he had seldom been visited by more "o' the women kind." Even Mrs. Swidger managed to drop in, her mistress being, as we know, in her bedroom.

"And what's the news, cousin?" asked Mrs. Josham, who had been in the shop some forty minutes when the large-nosed cook entered.

"Stars o' mine, I don't know what to say," answered Mrs. Swidger. "Bless my ole nerves! To think o' that poor lad hevin'

prison diet, skilley, an' all manner o' what, so as a dish o' rats, one 'ud think, 'll be a treat to him when he come out, though I couldn't eat 'em, even with green peas an' new potaties. An' what's to become of him I don't know. Mr. Storker dropped in to breakfast with master this mornin', an' I helped clear away, and says he to master, in his queer way, 'Poor Hern, I should hope he 'ont sink into a tramp an' vagrant, an' live in the brush-wood like a brake warbler, or get twenty-one days for layin' in the road without hevin' visible means of obtaining a livelihood.' And master said, 'He'll never be a disaple o' Codrus, or some one o' that sort. Tramps ain't in good repute nowhere, says he, an' in Swisserland they can't wote.' And Mr. Storker said, 'What a soldier he'd ha' made. He wouldn't hev bin like some frien' o' the Admiral's,' he said, 'who got to be a soldier for the smart dress,

an' was a coward all the time, though he knocked some teeth out o' the jaws o' some dead soldiers, an' they fetched him a tidy bit o' money afterwards.' "

"Soldier!" said Mrs. Swindell, a somewhat rare visitor at this place, "They'd better hev made him, as we say, bottle-washer an' supervisor of the swill-tub. Depend upon it, it's always a foolish thing for gentlefolks to take up a chap like that, who's as poor as wood, an' come of a stock that's not what I call jarnick. As I've heard his own father say, splodgers suit poor folk's feet better 'an patent leather. But he'd never bring his boy into the ranks along with others."

"Ah," said Mrs. Swidger, with a sigh, "an 'ont your Becky hold herself upright an' march along proud like in her London clothes, when she come to Heathhammock agen, to think she didn't get this poor lad for a lover, after all!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Olabar, the laundress, turning partly towards Mrs. Swindell, who was not popular; and "some folks 'll give themselves airs, for just being mixed up in a young man who is so much talked about. Oh, yes, if they'd bin robbed an' murdered theirselves, they couldn't give theirselves more airs. I advise such folks——"

"I don't want no advice from any woman here," said Mrs. Swindell, with asperity; "but, in this town, I'd never be surprised to hear a grocer advisin' a blacksmith in the matter of his trade. But, Becky or no Becky, I'm sorry for George Hern; but if he's guilty, he ought to be punished; an' no matter what lawyers may do, guilty men'll come to punishment. As my brother Bilge say, 'No matter what the greyhoun's do, the poacher'll have the ole hare at the hedge.'"

"I've heard," said Peggy Nunn, "that

once upon a time, he was sent by Boulder to buy a bit o' bacon with a bad shillin', but whether by accident or no, I don't know, I'm sure I raly don't."

"An' my husband said this morning," said Mrs. Hicklewade, "which he's a bit of a wag, an' not over particular about stickin' to the truth, that he's noticed a sort o' devil's look about George Hern of late."

"An' ole Boggis," said Mrs. Poppy, "who young Hern once threw into a ditch, for frightenin' some child'en in the dark, he say he once saw him drop a new two-shillin bit, and grab it up as if there was somethin' wrong about it."

"An' p'liceman Peacock told my son he was precious near runnin' this young Hern in once," said Mrs. Younghusband, "for threatenin', though playful like, to head a gang o' boys an' stone and besiege the police-station."

"I'm afraid Boulder had a bad heart, and ain't no better 'an a cannibal," said a certain Mrs. Bodle; "an' the boy'll be no better, though hevin' better larnin' than what his father had, he didn't ought to be so."

As this remark came from a woman who was in the habit of abusing even her own husband behind his back and in cold blood, it is probable that Boulder and Hern would have found champions among her female hearers, but she stopped all rejoinders by pouring out abuse, then and there, upon this poor husband of hers, who, she said, was far from what he ought to be to her and her family, and who, if she did not rule him aright, would pawn "her very spetticles" for beer.

"An' he went to sea in a rare bad temper this very blessed mornin'," said she, "for he quarrelled with some one last night, who gave him a blow which darkened his eye, an' his

brain too, I should think, for he spoke strange an' indistinct this mornin' before he could hev had anything to take, drat him."

"Well, young Hern was a smart lad, say what you will," said Mrs. Hicklewade, returning to the main topic, "an', as my husband say, if he'd been a 'ostler or a teamster, he'd hev been as good a hand as ever haltered hoss."

"However good a man he is," said Mrs. Bodle, "so much the gladder the Devil'll be to get him."

"How you do talk to be sure!" said Mrs. Swidger; "you puzzle me. Well, well, if George Hern is a scaramount, I'm glad he's no kin o' mine, for such trouble as this 'ud bring upon me 'ud bring death by stagnation o' blood, like enough, like poor Mrs. Baallum, when her on'y son, which gave her the bit crystal in her work-box, went down wi' thirteen han's, all told, i' the *Roman Bee*, wi' rum an' hides, which I happened that very

day (though seldom out) with Mrs. Jewell, with a basket o' five-crowned pippins agen Mr. Beamishs' shop, which smelt good tidy o' foul cheese that day; an' she told me the news, an' I'd ha' called for just a moment on Mrs. Baallum, but hevin' cried herself to bed, an' layin' in the dark as still as a copse (though a hard breather, an' with a tongue that could go like a windmill), I went off home, and was right glad to hev to get some bread ready for a fish-fry next day, not likin' to think o' the matter."

Similar conversation took place in other places besides Mr. Moll's little shop, but I will not pause to record any of it.

Mrs. Oscar's illness, though not a severe or lingering one, left rather alarming traces upon her maid. She had, however, sufficient influence over her husband to induce him to write privately to Mr. Warne of Sunderland, urging him to keep, if possible, all news-

papers from Clara, that she might not learn of Hern's misdoings, and make a rash expedition to Heathhammock or the county-town.

Under the skilful and economical management of the assignees, Mr. Kidd Ashbocking's estate realised enough to enable them to offer a tolerable dividend in an uncommonly short time. Mr. Mantle, whose town-bred family were not a little charmed by Heathhammock, arranged to take the banking business for one of his sons, the services of the plodding Mr. Anguish being retained; and Castle House, with a large proportion of its furniture and gim-cracks, was bought at a good price by a retired parliamentary agent. Mr. Oscar, moreover, disposed of many shares that seemed at first of a doubtful character, and enforced the payment in full or in part of many debts which the creditors considered worthless. Mr. Kidd, with his wife, his son,

and Ariel—Mrs. Oscar's wishes respecting Moloch being carried into effect—took up their abode at a pretty little cottage, with a few acres of land adjoining, about a mile outside Heathhammock, the property of Mr. Audrey, the rector, and recently vacated.

The glossy Bilge continued to smile within the walls of Castle House.

The creditors, under protest however from Mr. Tackett and Mr. Liddimer, presented Mrs. Kidd with her wardrobe, and her husband with enough furniture for his new home, together with some of his favourite curiosities. Mr. Oscar lent him a small sum of money to enable him to stock his little farm, and procured for him agencies from an insurance office, a spiced-cattle-food-manufacturer, and a corn, cake and coal-merchant.

His clerical landlord asked but a moderate rent, but his kindness was not wholly unconnected with certain revived hopes of

securing Clara Ashbocking, now that George Hern was cleared out of his path for ever, Bethel Ormerod was engaged to the daughter of a dean, and Storker Ashbocking, as the son of his tenant and debtor, was placed under a sort of obligation to him.

Hern was sentenced to three months' imprisonment without hard labour, but with a blot upon his name which nothing but a pardon could wipe out.

On the day after the trial at Quarter Sessions the rector began a series of neighbourly visits to the town-clerk, and the confinement of Mrs. Oscar to her bedroom afforded a reasonable pretext.

With exemplary patience he submitted to the wordy solicitor's harangues. Richard Rogers' views on private devotion, Cowper's and Flavel's on prayer, Secker's on zealous dissent, Bacon's on the Established Church, Luther's on hypocrisy, Rowland Hill's on a

Catholic spirit, Henry Smith's on preaching, Braid's on scepticism, Macklin's on the scientific qualities of the Bible, St. Austin's on the knowledge of God, Gildas' on the frailty of the clergy, Clotharius' on their merits, Swift's on female piety, and Home's on sin—with those of fourteen other divines on this last subject, were severally dinned into his ears. So also were quotations from the works of Pfaff, Stosch, Vanmildert, Saurin, and St. Eucher, and from the Ormulum, and I know not what else, with allusions to Dante's joy at being enrolled with Homer's band in Limbo, Mosheim's uncomplimentary reference to Jerome, the virtues claimed for the wafer in the catechism of Trent, the medal struck to commemorate the massacre of St. Bartholomew, Bishop Aylmer's attachment to bowls, Peter Birchet's attack upon his keeper, Montaigne's death in the attitude of prayer, Walter Stewart's gift of twenty thousand

merks for the propagation of Christian knowledge, the old Churchmen's description of ranters as "a sort of beasts that neither divide the hoof nor chew the cud," and the old Nonconformists' description of the churches as "unclean steeple-houses."

And with the like praiseworthy patience did he listen to tedious remarks from Mr. Kidd upon the architecture of his church, in which the Puritans "brake down many crosses, cherubims, angels, and superstitious pictures," and to his rather sarcastic criticism upon such old monkish ideas as that the bells were demonifuges; to Mrs. Kidd's narration of some of the hard names her late father used to give to polemic theologians, of which "cock-brained fools" and "preacher-prize-fighters," were among the least objectionable, and to her anecdotes, which usually embodied some such meagre episode, as the falling off of Mr. Mudd's skull-cap during his sermon; and,

lastly, to Storker's words of levity about Shibbolethic distinctions, and to such statements from him as that there were enough MS. sermons in the world to pave all the race-courses in England, and then to put a paper-frill round the British Isles.

And with like equanimity did he submit, during his one bold interview with Mrs. Oscar, to her caustic remarks that preachers of patience should take a taste of her recent headaches, which were as bad as dentists' tortures, and that preachers of peace should make rival tradesmen speak well of one another, and to her attacks upon church subscriptions, the averages of tithe rent-charges (which she called Protestants' Peter's-pence), upon cassocks, burettas and chasubles, and upon church decorations, the cost of which latter, she said, had better be saved, even if it be put into that grumbling Mr. Mudd's empty pocket. Almost the last re-

marks of this frank lady were: "Some women would leave a half-dressed child in the cold in order to put a parson's necktie right, but I wouldn't;" and, "As to confession to parsons, I would rather confess to a golden calf as being less stained with sin like myself." Yet Mr. Audrey left the room with a smile.

The hopes of the discomfited Storker also revived. He had many opportunities of making himself agreeable to the town-clerk, for, owing to the distance from the office of his father's new home, it was arranged that he should take luncheon with his superior. He seldom mentioned Clara's name, but, selecting her tenderness to dumb animals as his point of attack, he assured her father that he thought of openly denouncing sports, guns, traps, bird-lime, nesting, rat-baiting, and secret dog-fights; that he should tutor himself to speculate sympathetically on the

sufferings of a jelly-fish stranded in the sun, to coax a pig affectionately, though its throat must be cut soon afterwards, to admire the snake for his skin with something more than a woman's love of gaudy superficialities, and to remember that even hyænas will fondle their young. "And though," he said, "I may be apt to swerve from my professions occasionally, as the bishop said, in self-excuse, when he kicked and cursed his butler, I should not be surprised if I become almost as fond of a wart-hog as of a Christian, feel a prejudice against mahogany and chestnut wood exported from Spain because of the bull-fights there, and induce my father to set on foot a gigantic scheme for the feeding of man, bird, and beast on the vegetables and fruits of the earth, thus preying upon nothing that can feel pain."

As another instance of the thoroughness of his conversion, he said he believed it

possible that he might come to think that the chief objection to death in a cavalry-charge would be the inconvenience it would cause one's horse, and to question the wisdom and propriety of destroying fleas and flies, or knocking down a bat in one's pantry with a gridiron.

He would refer with great warmth to the horrors of vivisection, and once said that every mother in the land should be led to protest against it by being called upon by a committee demanding one of her children, that humanity might be benefited by an illustration of the effect upon its nerves of the cutting off of its nose and the spreading of mustard on the wound. "Let the practitioners make experiment upon blood-thirsty Sepoys," he said, "and cannibals, or upon English wife-beaters and garrotters."

Then he would point out matter of praise in the dumb creation. "Though a lion," he would say, "would not hesitate to crunch the

head of a Shakespeare, or a vulture to pick out Heemskerk's eyes, and though a cat will give you no glance of sagacity if you tell her she shall have a feast one day, and a cow will feel little self-reproach for stamping on a dying frog, and though the cuckoo is so unscrupulous as to steal the wagtail's nest, yet consider the honesty of the horse in never feigning lameness, the sagacity of the dog in never worrying a baby like a rat, however abominable the screeching it has to put up with from it ; the industry of the ants, as busy as brewing dames, and of the bees, which even the superstitions of this county have always respected, though they put reptiles and fish through rather heartless ordeals. Then consider the physical strength of the flea, which can drag a weight a thousand times greater than its own, and the constitutional strength of a fish, which can be revived from a frost-stupor by the heat of the fire.

"Think of the flying powers of the lark," he said, "familiar with the passages of the air, into which man can only venture in balloons; and the architectural powers of the wren and the mouse. The former is a more subtle architect than my father, and the latter is a wiser one, in that he makes his hole no larger than the laws of its existence demand."

And this suitor would listen, though not with the rector's patience, to the discourses of the town-clerk to which his own remarks would speedily give rise. Syrian dogs, Indian cockerels, Italian ravens, Aristotle on the habits of the cuckoo, Erasmus Darwin on the instincts of fishes, Pindar's narration of the sacrifices of asses among the Hyperboreans, the kind words written about these poor animals by many great authors, and the feast originated in their honour, the long-established shelters for doves and sparrows

in the East, the camel-drivers' habit of singing to their beasts, as Arion did to his dolphin, the Gentoos' respect for animal life, the discoveries of Aratus of Soli, and those of Jones of Nayland, and the multiplicity of life-enjoying creatures in the most sterile of the granitic districts, are but a few items of the subjects of which he treated tediously.

But one day the young solicitor dropped a significant hint which his elder interpreted aright.

"Oh, Storker," he said, hastily and seriously, "I think you are on a track which will lead you to disappointment."

"I hope not, sir. I feel more strongly every day that the prize is worth a great struggle. I would—I would ride a runaway horse into London on a foggy day to win it."

"These are strange words from one whose views of the other sex were so diverse from Mungo Park's, one who used to jeer at

women with their teapot-tattle, and who has expressed regret that the Statute of Witches was ever repealed, though no doubt unaware of the opinions of such men as Nider and Dodo upon these mysterious women."

"There are women, sir," said Storker, "whom I would thank a man to take to sea in a leaky boat, with a life-buoy to accommodate one. By George, sir, the public would take less pains to fish them up than they did to get the Great Seal from the Thames in James the Second's time."

"But one woman, at least, has gained your good opinion. I prophesied to this effect. You will become as fiercely racked with jealousy as the swain in Stifter's 'Angela.' It is not improbable that your affections will lead you to acts that might almost entitle you to a place in Hierocles' catalogue of simpletons. You begin to

acknowledge the bright side of the old dictum of Simonides: 'A man cannot possess anything that is better than a good woman.' I think you will very likely carry out the principles of Ischomachus as a married man. But, seriously, Storker, and setting the idea of Clara aside as impracticable, what do you say to the Misses Oxburrow?"

"I don't wish to mention them, nor they me, now, I expect; for I have noticed a marked diminution of their friendliness since my father's failure. But, sir, you will not forbid my making an attempt——"

"You had better be careful. Possibly she may address you in some such words as these of Midas: 'Peace, sauce-box!'"

"I should reply, 'I cannot bear so pointed a repulse,' as the thief said to the sentinel when he bayoneted him. I can't consent to regard Clara as a prize out of reach, like the giraffe's meal of tree-tops. I can't do that!"

"This is a painful subject, Storker," said Mr. Oscar, uneasily. "You know the poor girl's heart is fixed elsewhere already."

"*Was* fixed, sir, upon one whom she thought, as I did, strong in honesty, strong as an oak-log or a hook of steel, and most unlikely to join the staff of St. Nicholas' clerks and become a votary of Laverna. It would seem as if, when theft is in the blood, you might as well try to keep rats out of your pantry by posting up an epitome of the Larceny Act, as to eradicate it by good training. It's stupendously sad, however, to think that Hern may sink into the uncivil and ungenteel profession of a burglar, though he could very effectively perform the task of applying a crow-bar or bludgeon to the heads of his fellow-men. Poor fellow, his has been a fall indeed; for 'the higher one's sphere, the worse the miscarriage,' as the flying man said when his wings gave way."

"Your remarks are distasteful," said Mr. Oscar, sadly; "'Remember' (to quote Otway), 'he was my friend!'"

"Yes, yes, sir, and a good fellow too, with all his faults, and in spite of his origin. For my part, I consider it a question of small moment whether one's grandfather was a clay-worker or a paper-collar maker, or whether he could put a hatchment over his door. *Omnes a diis sunt.* I'm not proud. I would as willingly eat my supper in a clean cottage, as a harvestman would drink out of a pot with nine others."

"You agree with the spirit of Bolingbroke's remark, that lords are but commoners with coronets on their coats-of-arms? You hold with Seneca, that Philosophy looks not into pedigrees?"

"There is little difference, I think, sir, between the Pope and the Proletarii. But to return to Hern. He was never a cad,

though the huge advantage of mixing in good society has been, in great measure, denied him. He had a strange delicacy of feeling. I almost think that if he were hanged, he would beg the hangman to excuse him for leaving him so suddenly. I have no doubt but that he will bear his disgrace well, though it's poor work to watch how prettily the pieces of a broken vase will roll away. Don't think I wish to speak against the man, sir. I always liked him—but you see I have no slight desire to occupy, if possible, the place he has forfeited. If he had not forfeited it, I might have grown to have entertained for him an unmitigated dislike. The pretty bloom of a labernum bough won't save it from a curse if it's thrown across a wistful traveller's path."

"Once more, friend Storker," said Mr. Oscar, firmly, "this conversation is distasteful to me, and I must decline to proceed with it."

## CHAPTER XII.

One night, very shortly before Boulder's release from prison, Mrs. Oscar sorely disturbed her husband's rest by grumblings and ventral groans, and her answers to his few questions were peculiar enough to cause him grave alarm, strange as her manner had been during the previous few days. This anxiety was not alleviated, when he awoke early on the following morning, by the discovery that she was not in the bedroom.

He speedily dressed himself and roused his servants. In a few minutes, however, to his relief, he found his wife in her lumber-room, apparently dusting and rearranging

her strange and sordid treasures. She was but partly and very curiously dressed, and had muffled a polonaise round her throat.

"Why, Mary Ann," exclaimed her husband, "you seem to be attired in a strange mixture of garments, and might rival the odd appearance of Schiller's Sonnenwirth. Won't you come upstairs again?"

"Why?" she demanded, turning rather fiercely towards him. "Haven't I had enough of upstairs' imprisonment? Haven't I been tortured enough with wretched physics?"

"I have no wish that you should be tortured with physics, or with 'possets and good old wives' plaisters,' as honest Sexton Diego has it."

"Do you wish to cage me up for ever?" she continued. "I never was one to keep in my bed-room, nor to mind cold or wet weather. I never was like some women, who

almost go to bed in their goloshes. I've been sadly, I own, but I shall be better than ever soon. Oscar," she added, putting her face near to his, and fixing her eyes upon him with a wild look that almost made him recoil, " I intend to go about with a basket and pick up little things that have a value, though the world neglects them—paper, and straw, and twigs, and cucumber-peel, and outer cabbage-leaves, and cockle and oyster shells, and even nettles and weeds ; and I shall call on people at their meal time, and I shall get sample potatoes and things for nothing. Oh, I'm not proud. I would eat mussels at a stall in a fair if any one would pay for them, and I'd carry a drain-pipe through the street if it was clean and I could lift it. I will tell you a secret ; there are a lot of good bits of slate-pencils left about the National School every day, and the fruiterer up the street often throws apples out of his shop that are only

half-decayed. There's something to exercise your thoughts upon, if you understand me. And I will tell you another secret. I have sometimes thought, when I have been lying upstairs, that I shouldn't mind dressing up like a beggar, and going round with a bag of rice and a dumpling, in case I didn't succeed in getting much. You are staring pretty hard at me! Well, I don't wonder, for I have had some of the strangest dreams. I dreamt that I stole Mr. Mudd's skull-cap, and wrote long letters on newspapers and sent them at the cheap postage-rate; and I got into a scrape for trespassing somewhere; and I upset a plateful of maccaroni over the carpet at Mrs. Pittock's, but that didn't matter, for I had had a capital share of chicken and ham; so I went home, and—would you believe it? —sat down on the stove and ate a poultice."

With this she advanced to the chimney, and began peering up into its black recess,

disregarding her frightened husband, who twice called her by name and begged her to go upstairs with him.

"It was a dreadful thing," she said, presently, "this robbery, and I never feel comfortable at night. I think I should have that Swindell sleep in the house; but I'm afraid he'd come down, after we were all in bed, and get at the spirits somehow, and lie in my favourite chair in the drawing-room, and drink himself stupid. Oh, there's another thing I'm going to do, too, Oscar; go about and get in your outstanding debts. Let us have things settled up. Let's have them settled up—And, when they clean the pump-well in the market-place, I have been thinking you might get some of the gravel for the garden. They will give it to their town-clerk. And those old bricks against the east gate of the common, they would give you them. And those hand-bells in the church—they were

your father's once—why not claim them? Oscar, I sometimes think there are some secret cupboards in this house, but I will never consent to have the walls picked about to find them while I am alive. But my opinion has come to be poorly esteemed."

She sat down upon the old cow-hide box, and began shuffling her feet and making a ticking sound with her tongue. At this moment Trippington entered.

"Oh! mistress, mistress!" she exclaimed, emboldened by her genuine distress, "you, that weren't to leave your bed, here in this damp place! You'll have the hand of death upon you, that you will!"

"There's no hand on me," said Mrs. Oscar, looking around her.

The town-clerk drew her arm within his own and raised her to her feet. She then returned by his side to her bed-room with little opposition. She stopped abruptly, how-

ever, before the looking-glass, gazing at her reflection.

"I have rather a hot spirit, I sometimes think," she said, with a frown, "and my face looks a little fire-dried, I verily believe. I am sorry I should be ill, Oscar, at your expense, but you wouldn't like to send me to the workhouse, with a certificate of permanent ailments. How are you, Trippington?"

"Right ill to see you in that lumber-room, ma'am," answered Trippington, "a'most killed with grief."

"Oh, that's a foolish state and a wrong one," said her mistress, suffering her husband to remove the disfiguring polonaise; "for if you kill yourself, don't you deprive me of your services without a reasonable notice? and I could not turn your body to any account at all. But if you won't let me go into the lumber-room, you must dust it yourself; and you mustn't spoil your clothes," she

added, glancing sardonically at the poor servant's well-worn attire.

In a few moments she was again in bed, but she continued speaking:

"I'm not going to talk about death and worms and spirits," she said, taking her husband's hand. "I object to death: but there is one thing to consider, if life were not uncertain—life estates would not be freehold, and that change would upset many arrangements, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, yes. Now compose yourself, and try and get a little sleep."

"I wouldn't go to sleep if I could help it, if I thought I should never wake again—would you?"

"I think it would take a large quantity of Midas' bulls' hot blood to put me to sleep if I had that conviction," he replied, smiling.

Swidger entered with a cup of tea, of which the invalid took a few sips.

"There," said Mr. Oscar soothingly, "you will be better now."

"Now means the present moment, and I feel exactly as I did before," she answered sharply, and pressing her hand to her forehead. "You seem to treat me as if my faculties were leaving me. But—but let me think—why, an army can be strategical even in retreat, you know."

"Yes, yes; and the Ionian vessels of old would retreat with their heads still turned to the foe."

"When I die," she continued, "don't have a lot of mourning coaches follow me, each seeming to press and trample me down further from life and light. I wonder what effect my death will have on you and on the business; but I shan't know, and I never cared to guess and speculate on the unknown. We have been happy together, on the whole, Oscar?"

"Oh, yes; and shall bear one another in remembrance after death."

"After whose death?" was the quick rejoinder. "How can I undertake to say what I shall do after my own death?"

He patted her hand with a tenderness he could not have surpassed in the days of their courtship, long ago; and though she soon afterwards fell into an uneasy sleep, he sat by her bedside patiently till long after his clerks had come to the office. At length, after kissing her brow very softly, he stepped from the room with noiseless feet, but with a grievous weight upon his heart.

## CHAPTER XIII.

In due time Boulder returned to Heath-hammock. Not a word of his son's imprisonment had been breathed to him in the gaol, though he had slept under the same great grim roof night after night. Hern took an early opportunity of telling one of the warders of his wish to avoid his father's observation; and, as he proved as docile and good-humoured as he was comely, and, though not a hard-labour prisoner, volunteered to "lend a hand" at any time, the officer gave him material help in carrying out his project in the chapel and in the exercise ground.

Before Boulder reached his lodgings, how-

ever, the terrible truth had been revealed to him, and it was confirmed by Mrs. Josham on his arrival at her house. In further confirmation, he soon afterwards received from Mr. Oscar Ashbocking the private note his son had left for him.

Retreating to his bedroom and locking the door, he opened the plainly-written letter, his strong hands trembling with emotion, and slowly and laboriously he read as follows :

"DEAR FATHER,

"I was putting back the stolen money when Mrs. Ashbocking came suddenly into the room and caught me.

"I can save you from a heavy punishment by bearing a light one myself; and I am ready to do so. When I come out we will go together somewhere far away. If Mr. Oscar won't help us now, I can sell my

books and raise a little money. But, father, while I am away, don't go again near that fatal room—don't again disgrace yourself with theft.

"If you are in great trouble, I must think Mr. Oscar will help you, for the sake of—of the times when he did not think me a scoundrel.

"I earnestly beg you to be good and honest in return for what I am now doing for you. I beg this for both our sakes.

"Be careful to keep the strictest silence about these things, or my punishment will be in vain. Good-bye.

"GEORGE HERN."

The stalwart old fisherman threw himself upon the bed sobbing, and there he remained for more than two hours. At length he rose into a sitting posture, and, pressing the letter to his lips, began muttering in a low tone, with a vacant look in his eyes.

"I always knew he was a lad o' the finest thread, an' here's the proof. I hear him speak them words, an' they're thrillin' an' vibratin' down all the passages inside me. Would to God you were with me, that I might grasp your hand, my boy! But there's a weight like pig-iron on my breast, an' my eyes are like the eyes of a dead fish, an' my head creaks like a rotten basket. For him to be handed up to odium, as they say, to be a byword an' an astonishment an' a branded man! It shan't be! I'll give myself up an' be done for for ever. What's life at the best? An' yet, with this little trouble over, we might be happy together somewhere else. Oh, we'll have a banquet some day over this, if it on'y be with a seed-cake an' some spiced ale that's hid under the bed till we're ready for it, and bought with a pawned pocket-handkerchief. Breath o' my body! what a reward for what I've done for this lad is this!

He went at it generous and brave, without no hesitation an' like a man, an' he without a drop o' the thief in his nature, an' who look on any slippery act (God forgive me!) as a thing to be turned away from, an' a very foul thing, an' who'd never be brought by all the devils of hell (unless it be his own father) to know the insides o' the casual wards, an' thieves' kitchens, treadmills, an' hulks, an' gallowses."

After another spell of silent thought, he left the room and the house, bending his steps by a circuitous route towards the common.

Heathhammock seemed to have changed since he was last there, though upon the outside of the old house of Mr. Batch, the billsticker, in Ashbocking Street, was stuck, as there had often been stuck before, a bill of a sale by Mr. Boxford, for the Receiver of Wrecks, and Mr. Punchard's van, sometimes termed "the slow and dirty," was being unladen of its last parcels at its owner's door,

as in the past, and though the coast-guards were carrying on their customary pistol-practice on the beach, and some labourers of the tenant of the Corporation Farm were carrying soil from the cliff-side, as theretofore, to spread upon his light lands.

The rector's pony, standing at a cottage door, gazed at him with shifting ears and a listless champing of its bit, but he thought its gaze reproachful. The coachman of Mr. Bethell Ormerod, who had left his master's little nieces at Mrs. Pittock's, where they were to take a light tea, and was going to refresh his grosser frame with a pint of stout, seemed to the released prisoner to eye him with marked distrust. A poor old beach-man, who had buried, two days before, the last of his four sons, and who spoke to him in all kindness, seemed to fix a sternly searching eye upon his face; and a beggar, in a sort of woollen habergeon, who had extorted, among

other donations, sixpence from Mr. Kidd and a penny from Mr. Oscar—together with the remark that he should by honest work procure a coat less like Grimgoire's, which had more holes in it than a chestnut roaster—seemed to pass him with a furtive air.

He walked to the ferry and crossed it, and sitting down in the little inn at Southaston, ordered brandy.

The landlord, who was alone at this time, entered into conversation, telling his visitor, who was of course well known to him, how the southerly winds had kept the herring shoals from coming ashore, and how poor the hauls of whiting and sprats and other fish had been.

"You know where I've bin, I dessay," said Boulder, gloomily, "an' that's why you tell me o' this ?"

"Well, yes, o' course," said the landlord, "but as to the desarvin o' the punishment, the

beachmen are with you. But as to the weather, mate, we've had such a sight o' rain, I felt a'most inclined to tell Mr. Beamish to hang his shop-front wi' water-proofs an' umbrellas, an' there's a gaudy sky an' a west wind now, an' no man knows better an' you that that mean more rain."

"Mate," said Boulder, impressively, "get me another sup o' that there brandy. I'd rather hev my boy George here beside me at this moment than be give the best copper-fastened vessel in the world!"

"I can believe ye," said the landlord, "though few know better what a good wessel an' what good tackle mean. I'm right down sorry the lad has disgraced you."

"Disgraced!" cried Boulder. "Oh, God eternal! I bless him. See here, I bless my son! But let me alone, I 'ont say no more."

And now the mute sorrow of this man, so

ready to utter loud and angry words, was awful to behold.

The landlord left the room and stood by the open door. After a time Boulder came to him and, with a firmness of voice and manner difficult to oppose, demanded the loan of a sovereign and of a knife, leaving his watch as security for these and for the price of his brandy.

"I shall take a little walk and then go home," he said. "There 'll be rainfall soon, an' there's a fresh-to-strong west-south-westerly breeze not far away."

He strolled as far as Mr. Ormerod's woods, only pausing to decline an offer of a handful of red-rose gooseberries from a friendly cottager, and sat down on the green bank dividing the first wood from the road and commanding a view of the sea.

It was an ancient wood, and a very solemn chaunt seemed to be breathed by its trees

while the breeze passed through them, as if its long life of peace and purity had won for it some little part on earth in the music of eternity. But when the breeze was at rest a universal stillness settled on the sultry land. A web, stretching from fence to fence, glittered motionless before the old fisherman's eyes; a silent linnet sat on a silent bough above him; a lazy and dusty meadow-brown butterfly hovered within reach of his hand; and a ringdove, solitary and slothful, seemed unwilling to rise from the mossy ground hard by.

With one hand holding his chin and the other resting on the bank, which was warm, though shaded well, Boulder gazed vacantly at the sea and sky, till a change in them aroused him.

A low-sailing, overshadowing congregation of dark clouds were rising with threatening speed in the quarter to which the wind was blowing, and the indented horizon and

the restless, foaming crests of the waves told of sympathetic agitation in the sea, expectant of a visit of waters from above, while the gentle breeze was changed into a hollow, humming wind, that seemed to suppress and renew its groans irregularly, like one almost weary of a struggle with bitter heart-ache.

In a few moments the ominous signs increased, till the sky seemed full of grim, deep-coloured vapour, that looked but an uncongenial home for crystal rain. The waves writhed yet more vehemently. The trees murmured as if in emulation of the thunder near at hand, and the wind moaned with a deeper tone of sadness, as if bewailing its exile from heaven, below whose clouded walls it roamed, beating at them in vain.

Then came the heavy rain-drops, pressing down the little flowers, as if they might not even look at this heaven to-day. The lightning flashed, and the thunder, that single

voice that comes to earth from the silent clouds, spoke impressively indeed.

" Now's the time to put back this other bit o' gold," said Boulder, rising abruptly, and striding from the partial shelter of the fringe of the wood into the rain-splashed road.

## CHAPTER XIV.

On this same evening, Mr. and Mrs. Kidd Ashbocking, at the request of the depressed town-clerk, paid a visit to Mrs. Oscar, who was prevailed upon to give them a short audience in a small and poorly-furnished chamber adjoining her bedroom, into which chamber was taken one of her favourite chairs.

Traces of unquestionable aberration of mind had been plentiful enough during the past two days; but on that afternoon her intellect had seemed more lucid, and Mr. Oscar, who had sent a message to his daughter asking her to return home, hoped that these visitors would amuse his invalid.

She declined to admit Storker to her presence; so, as he had arranged to accompany his parents home, he consoled himself by reading the newspaper and playing with Moloch, whom he had surreptitiously admitted through the window into "the old blue drawing-room."

"If I don't intend to get wrong with this household altogether," he muttered, "I must avoid this lady's society as much as possible. She has a habit of giving one the 'retort not courteous,' which 'can hardly be called agreeable, though there maybe little in it,' as the woman said of the hot kettle when she hurled it at her husband."

The "awkward couple" had hardly seated themselves in their inhospitable reception-room before the tempest began, and this seemed to damp the conversational ardour of all present. But after a time Mr. Oscar spoke of the weather, and directly afterwards

his wife, rising from her chair to adjust the window-blind, and exposing to full view her rather strange attire, drew from him this second remark:

"You must excuse Mary Ann's appearance—her somewhat 'preposterous fashion and fantastic draperies,' to quote Tertullian. You know she never was much inclined to study the public opinion. And as to this same public opinion, though it is true, many, from Narses to the lawyer Lord Clare, have suffered for their disregard of it——"

His remark was stopped by a sharp ejaculation of disapproval from his wife.

"I've been wondering," she said, glaring at Mr. Kidd, "what you have come here for. Have you come to speak of pest-houses, and madness, and mockeries of laughter? I am not well. My appetite is capricious, and I am troubled with acute pains, dim sight, and giddiness."

"You must also excuse her," continued Mr. Oscar, with a sad smile, "if you don't find her quite 'still and sweet-opinioned,' as Fletcher has it."

"It is better not to be than to be so thoughtless, and smiling, and gay, as some people, in spite of their troubles and blunders," said Mrs. Oscar, still looking sternly at Mr. Kidd, causing him to draw a deep breath. "Castle House was full of monuments to folly."

"Kidd is, like Petronius, gay even in his sorrows," said Mr. Oscar, gently.

"He has wronged me and many others," said Mrs. Oscar, continuing to stare at the unfortunate ex-banker. "I speak candidly, as you would, if you had the sharp tingling in your feet which I am now being tortured with. I know I am not free from faults, but I have wronged nobody, I think."

"I do not think you can be accused of many faults," said Mr. Oscar, solicitously.

"I have always been thought a person of integrity; but Kidd would accuse me of avarice for sixpence," was the abrupt remark of Mrs. Oscar.

"Avarice!" exclaimed her husband. "That weakness, as Seneca says, 'scrapes and gathers together what somebody will be the better for,' though I think, by the way, Andrew Fuller compares it to a Moloch with its victims. Avarice, in a greater or less degree, has its habitat——"

"I remember reading that word in a passage about the chimpanzee," said Mrs. Oscar, in irascible tones. "You must not talk foreign languages to me. I never liked the Scotch in Scott's novels, and always skipped over the hard names in "Don Quixote." Surely we can express ourselves in English without sprinkling our talk with '*ipse dixit*' and '*savoir faire*,' '*al fresco*' and '*à plomb*.'"

Mr. Oscar was sorely tempted to allude to

Mulcaster's praise of the English tongue, the French translation of Schmalz, the English of Al Zahel, Townley's of Hudibras, Coleridge's of Schiller, Chateaubriand's of Milton, and Flaccus' of Apollonius, Horsley's Latin Euclid, the Italian notes in the Editio Terracii of Aristophanes, the French matter in Dacier's Horace, and the Latin and Greek in Ortolan; but he contented himself with a remark about Mansfield's oration in praise of Demosthenes, adding—

"You would be rather alarmed at some of the words in Demosthenes."

"I am not fond of the intermixing of other languages in one's conversation," said Mr. Kidd. "One almost expects to hear persons who have a weakness for this practice speaking of 'auctorities' and 'gigants.' I once knew a man who would curse you in his heart if you spoke of Æschylus as the author of the 'Antigone,' but who de-

fined 'Valparaiso' as 'a Portuguese geographer'!"

"I know the argument you would plunge into," said Mr. Oscar. "You would rather find one of the missing charts of Cabot than all the lost comedies of Epicharmus of Cos, or the lost 'Ogdoades' of Du Bellai. Well, well, you and I have both our peculiarities. As Cicero says, it is hard to find perfection, and, as Horace says, we all have faults."

"It can hardly be necessary to drag in the names of these ancients to support such truisms," said Mr. Kidd.

"The younger Pliny said, 'Give me a penny,' and accept a story worth gold," was the town-clerk's reply; "but I exact no tribute for the conversation you censure; and if I sometimes repeat myself like a cockerel, I must try and amend, though Livy says the past can never be retrieved."

"I confess that much of your conversation is as distasteful to me as the learning of dates to an idle boy," said Mr. Kidd, encouraged by the supposed approval of Mrs. Oscar. "If you would tell me something, now, about the utilising of dead leaves as stable-litter, or the tying of red-worsted on spoon-bait, or about linen-bleaching, I might listen to you with pleasure; but really, to have to listen, as I had to do a few minutes ago, to statements about sacramental confession, Oolah's "Garden of Knowledge," the adventures of M. de Brisson, the influence of ancestors upon their descendants, Arrian's work on India, Florian's translation of Eliezer, the good and evil results of poverty upon the intellect——"

"Don't you talk of poverty!" interposed Mrs. Oscar harshly, and shuffling her feet with great impetuosity. "What! is my little disagreement with Oscar, about Clara,

to lead to this? Do you dare to interfere with my husband?"

"I don't interfere with mine," said Mrs. Kidd. "I try to bear patiently all that occurs, though I sometimes feel inclined to say, as my poor father used to do, 'No times like the old times.' But, as to talk, of which we were speaking, Storker says it should be small in quantity, and pungent in quality, like a rasher of bacon."

"I fear I shall always be rather garrulous," said the town-clerk. "I cannot appreciate Teufeldroch's 'benignant efficacies of concealment;' and though Ovid considers silence a trifling excellence, it seems to lie out of my reach. In speech I am, as some of the Saxon Kings were in deeds (according to Daniel), 'in continual action, having little outlets or leisure.' Whewell says that language is the clothing of the whole nature of man——"

"Well," said Mrs. Kidd, "then perhaps you are right to give us so much; for clothing is a good thing; and some of your language is very good, and should improve as well as clothe. And talking of clothes, I hope people won't consider the bonnet I think of using as my best too smart for my altered circumstances; and especially that people won't think so in church."

"Sensible people wouldn't care if you wore a bit of boiled beef on your head, and hung my scales and steelyards on your ears," said Mrs. Oscar, with a bitter smile; "but if your conscience pricks you, wear a dingy bonnet."

"What!" exclaimed the other lady, with elevated eyebrows; "with those trimmings to my jacket? No, thank you; it would spoil all; there are some people of taste among the congregation. Not that I mean to say you have none, Mary Ann, though certainly the Rector didn't think it worth while

consulting you last month about the clothes we proposed to distribute among the widows, and Storker once said you would wear a bonnet as big as a tramway-car without a groan."

"Storker is a conceited fellow—a person I should not regard," said Mrs. Oscar, turning her back upon Mrs. Kidd indignantly. "I know all about a mother's prejudices in favour of her children. Have I not a dear child of my own?" she added in a softened tone. "But I don't care to name her in any sort of connexion with your Storker," she resumed, her voice austere again.

"Oh, don't be angry. Storker made fun of me as well as of you," said Mrs. Kidd, good-humouredly; "for when I said I ought to know a little about tramways, having a friend in the steel rail and tyre trade, in Sheffield, to whom I sent a kit of sprats last November, he said that I might as well say that he

ought to understand about bush-draining, because he had a friend who had plenty of faggots, or that he ought to make the best of sausages, having a friend who had a large piggery. Storker will be a good youth, and will make a good lawyer one day, though I don't see how he can be expected to talk like Oscar; for Oscar can't ride, and shoot and swim, and play at cricket like him; and while he was learning these things, no doubt Oscar was learning to talk. I hope he will settle at Heathhammock, though he sometimes talks of going to America and making his fortune and sending us home lots of money."

"He will be more likely to borrow a postage stamp to write home for five pounds," said Mrs. Oscar drily, as she rose and altered the position of her chair. "He is not fond enough of work. He will never singe his hair, in absence of mind, over his studies, as

Oscar has done. He is too fond of joking, and shooting and hunting and play—and Swidger is too fond of gossipping, and Trippington of day-dreaming with mouth open."

"Let us hope," said Mr. Oscar, that Storker won't always act in the spirit of the motto, '*valeat res ludicra*,' or take as his model Lun of old, with his 'frolic gestures.'"

"Talking of hunting, Mary Ann," said Mrs. Kidd, "only the other day we were speaking of ladies in connection with that sport; and Storker said that if you rode, he believed you would leap the worst of places if you could pick up a horseshoe or stirrup-strap on the other side—but you mustn't mind his fun."

"He is a skipjack," said Mrs. Oscar, snappishly, "and has not even the merit of his father, who could at least put a new handle to a water-pot."

"And tell you something about the water-

gates of Inigo Jones," said Mr. Kidd, smiling.

"But you might learn something of your son too," said Mrs. Oscar, with a frown. "He at least doesn't put his coat-button into his waistcoat button-hole, as I have seen you do. Positively, a stranger might mistake you for a pig-dealer sometimes."

"I was once mistaken for a steel-pen pedlar," said Mr. Kidd, mildly.

At this moment a tremendous peal of thunder made a pause in the conversation.

"Kidd," said Mrs. Oscar, breaking the silence, and with an abrupt change in her manner, "I want you to borrow a basket of tools, and to repair much of the wood-work in this house, now that you have a good deal of time to spare. Don't forget the shelves in the cellar; and don't knock down and stamp on some herrings there; and don't smoke in the house, and don't let me ever see again that

cheap wooden pipe, with the bowl that falls off on to the carpet; and when you smoke, smoke your tobacco to the ashes—and, for my part, I don't see why you shouldn't put the ashes themselves into your pot, they would swell out the rest of the tobacco a little. Oscar," she added, turning suddenly to her husband, "we must carry out my wishes for a stricter economy. I think a good deal about this, and as to church subscriptions, though I feel a little reconciled to them by the sight of you holding the plate and exacting alms from so many other people, I'm not fond of them. I don't like that thunder. I am glad this house is strong: but George Hern is in a stronger. I ought to be thankful the law put him aside, out of my path, without my taking any stern measures against him, for my dear daughter's sake. Ay, you may shake your head, Oscar, but one must look to one's own family first, and to one's own interest, even at heavy cost to others."

"You remind me of a saying of Storker's," said Mrs. Kidd; "'a sexton may wish a father of ten to die if he wants the interment-fee to pay off a beerhouse score.'"

"Poor Hern," said Mr. Oscar, "he is branded deeply, though not in the flesh, as the Samians and Athenians branded each other in the days of Pericles and Melissus, and the French branded their fraudulent bankrupts in the time of the first Napoleon. But let us not talk of him."

"No, no," said Mrs. Kidd. "Let us not spoil our appetites for supper (I enjoy that meal, now that we have given up late dinners) by talking about poor George Hern and prisons. As to thunder, Mary Ann, you cannot dislike it more than I do."

"You were always a timid thing, though big," said Mrs. Oscar; "and, to speak frankly, rather soft, and a muddler!"

"Why, Storker laughed when I told him

you called me soft before, and said if you would only infuse into me a little of your own nature, I should soon have more of the hardness of the 'tawny rocks.'"

"I am not so ill that I cannot understand insults," said Mrs. Oscar, rising, and speaking with indignant emphasis. "Bella, you are a hopeless ninny, whom no surgeon or physician can cure; a simpleton——"

"No, no," interposed Mr. Oscar. "Why, Mary Ann, you remind me of Cambyses, whose malady was exhibited by a great severity to kinsfolk and connections. Come, come, that sour look is very disfiguring, so that we have not even the satisfaction of confronting, like Acripanda in the Italian play, 'a lady beautiful at once and fierce.'"

"Let Bella leave the room," said Mrs. Oscar doggedly; "let her go to—to Jericho!"

"No, I shouldn't like to go there," said Mrs. Kidd.

"Why not?" cried Mrs. Oscar. "I would go if a fortune could be made there, and—and I were better."

"And, I dare say, would hardly hesitate to travel in a chest, like Grotius," said her husband, smiling, but cautiously, "if the ship-master would take you thus at a greatly reduced fare. No one can accuse you of want of spirit."

"How dark it has been!" said Mrs. Oscar, suddenly changing her look of asperity for one of solemnity. "But the sky is brightening slowly. Others besides the watchmakers would be puzzled if there were to be no more sun. I am glad the storm is passing away."

"And so am I," said Mrs. Kidd; "though, as Storker says, a tempest is generally as harmless as a giant's severed hand, or a lion wrought in silk. But listen!" she suddenly cried; "I thought I heard a shout, and the voice was his."

The mother's ear had not deceived her. The shout was repeated, and the town-clerk and his cousin hastened down to the garden, whence these ominous sounds arose.

## CHAPTER XV.

STORKER, weary of his newspaper and of his sport with his dog, had just turned from the drawing-room mirror, at which he had been examining the state of his whiskers, and had walked to the window rather listlessly to watch the dying storm, when his interest was aroused by the sight of a man's form, which came hastily, yet with a stealthy air, down the side-path of the garden towards the house. In spite of the thick rain and the shadow still cast on all things by the sky, he saw in a moment that it was Boulder's.

"Another bit of robbery!" he muttered, shrinking back. "This is what I call uncommonly extraordinary."

Advancing again, and noiselessly opening one of the windows, he looked out with watchful eyes, that defied the rain, and saw the trespasser pass under the ancient yew-tree and in among the shrubs around the notorious lumber-room window—which had not been further secured, its most valuable treasure being gone.

Moloch rose from his position of ease upon the hearthrug, growled suspiciously, and then began to bark in a low tone, looking with inquiring eyes at his master, who stood in hesitation at the open window; but upon the latter whispering, "What is it, boy?" the dog sprang out into the garden, gazed around him for a moment with ears erect, and then darted off, snarling ominously, to the shrubs among which Boulder had disappeared.

Storker gave two loud shouts, to attract his father and the master of the house, and

then went in the direction taken by his dog, but with far more cautious steps.

"I have not a mean opinion of my own strength," he thought; "but this fellow is doubtless and decidedly a desperado of an intense water; and I doubt the two reserves I have summoned are about equal duffers on an occasion like this."

He stopped, for the sounds of a desperate struggle between Moloch and Boulder could be heard now.

"By George!" he muttered, but with no jocularity in his expression, "a scuffle between these two would be rather 'an interesting picture viewed from a safe distance,' as the thief said of the gallows. But I should not like to have the dog killed," he added, stepping forward more briskly.

Boulder had forced an entrance into the lumber-room when Storker's shouts reached his ears; but they caused him to lay down

his sovereign hastily, and to retreat to the window. He had thrust his head and his broad shoulders through the little aperture, when the powerful bull-terrier, with angry eyes, plunged through the wet shrubs, and, before the man could withdraw, fixed his teeth with a terrible grip in the side of his neck, towards the upper part of the throat.

It was an awful position, for the wedged-in fisherman could not use either of his arms advantageously; and though, by drawing one back into the room, he made the other of greater service, and at length succeeded in dragging the dog through the window, and then tearing himself away from him, he staggered, and fell to the floor from pain and exhaustion, and the animal fastened on his throat again. But at this juncture Storker, pale and scared, looked in at the window, and seeing the state of the struggle,

cried out vehemently to his infuriated guard, and enforced a reluctant retreat upon him.

Mr. Oscar and his cousin soon afterwards came upon the scene, and a great commotion ensued. A mattress was spread upon the floor, and Swindell and Dr. Staggold were summoned. The gardener laid his mangled and dying antagonist upon his last couch with a kindly gentleness of touch which Boulder seemed to acknowledge in the silent look he turned upon him.

The doctor came and dressed the wound, but at once saw that hæmorrhage and phlebitis had fastened upon his patient, and that the end was near.

For some time Boulder lay motionless, except that he rolled his eyes about the room. Suddenly, however, these became immovably fixed upon the doorway with a troubled stare, and the other inmates of the room, following

his glance, discovered Mrs. Oscar peering in at the prostrate form.

"This dark place suits my head better than the light upstairs, but I cannot face that spectacle! It's ghastly, it's ghastly!" she said hoarsely; then turned, and, with a partly suppressed but wild and thrilling cry, hastened away unsteadily.

The incident seemed to rouse the wounded man, and, seeing that he made a strong effort to speak, the doctor ordered that some wine should be given him. He drank eagerly, and then, in a broken and hardly audible voice, confessed the truth about the robbery from that room, and pointed to the substituted sovereign on the floor. His declaration was written down and signed by Dr. Staggold as a justice of the peace, and Hern's letter was taken from his father's pocket and read.

"It is some comfort to do justice to him at the last, sir," murmured Boulder to Mr. Oscar,

"an' I know you'll see him released as soon as may be."

"I will, and gladly," answered the town-clerk earnestly.

"There is something stupendously grand in such self-sacrifice," said Storker warmly.

"I've felt guilty all day, sir, an' ashamed," continued Boulder; "my bright times hev always seemed to hev somethin' to darken 'em somehow. The money I was so proud an' fond on (though generous once) was taken from me, an' what I've kep' right an' done for the boy, though it's pleased me of'en, seem small enough now. I felt to-day, sir, as if I could commit suicide, an' that's the truth."

"Suicide!" said Mr. Oscar, soothingly. "Cast away the thought. You don't want a quotation from Josephus to teach you the folly and sin of that."

"I don't want to die, sir, an' not on'y for

my own sake, sir. I feel it hard to part from my boy. I'm a weak fool to blubber," he continued, the tears rolling down his manly, though now bloodless, face.

"Cæsar wept," muttered Mr. Oscar, "and the tears were worthy of him. This was a maxim of Christiana, Queen of Sweden."

"God will take care of my son, sir," said Boulder. "I can't no longer now. I've bin an arnest man, sir, with no play about me; but I've been a fool, an' a bad man, too, an' here's the close. I'll take a little more wine, sir. Thank you," he added, after drinking deeply. "Time was, sir, I could swaller a pint of rum at sunrise, an' felt little the wuss. Time was, I was as active as our life-boat, which I shall never guide no more, which leap at the surf like a tiger when you launch her, and clear herself to the gratin's if she fill. An' when I was off the mouth of the Indus—but where's the use o' boastin' o'

that ?" he mumbled, rather dreamily. "Now I'm water-locked, an' ain't no more fit to face hefty weather. No chance o' weather moderatin' now, an' I can't get no foothold on deck. I'm slippin' from my anchor, an' there ain't no sightin' land—there ain't no channel. All's wrong with me—stanchions, bowsprit, backstays, an' all past using—chains parted, carger shifted, last strand of the cable—come to be beached an' overhauled in dry dock an' handed over to the ship-breakers—such a wreck !"

There was a short pause, during which his features writhed with pain, and then he added, in a still lower tone ;

"But I 'ont talk o' the sea, now, but the land—land an' George. No sea for him ; no goin' down to the bottom, like Hole's boat ; no venturin' aboard-ship off Spittal Beach an' Clock Light, an' Jordan Flats an' Carrikfergus Bank. God know how many

sail o' boat are saved by miracle every year. An' if you're in the navy sarvice, let alone the risk of breakin' by court-martial, you may be knocked into your grave by a round shot without no stress o' weather, an' the sea mod'rate to smooth, like poor Ned Skinner, that was rated captain's cockswa'n in a screw line-o'-battle-ship under Napier in the Baltic. What am I ramblin' to? You'll hev an eye to the boy, sir. His mother, sir, was poor, but, for all her dishonour, she'd a good heart, an' a lip as ripe an' red as any duchess. An' I loved her, sir, an' I can't say but I may be passin' away to see her—passin' away before I go too near to rust an' wrong. I've bin to church, sir, a many times, an' not to the meetiners' place, where they don't even hev no Litany, an' I've sometimes thought that if ever I got a real good boat, I'd name her 'Church of England.'"

There was another silence, and in a

moment there came a strange expression of awe and excitement in the old seaman's face, and he peered about him as if the air were peopled with shapes that were visible to him alone.

"What treachery is here?" he exclaimed, with much eagerness in his feeble voice. "Speak to me some one—Mr. Oscar, Mr. Kidd, sir, you were friendly with me once!"

"Lift your heart to God, and be at peace with Him," said Mr. Oscar, earnestly.

"Some one was tellin' o' the ole admiral's prophesyin's aginst my son," continued Boulder, "an' o' Reuben Hern's curse that went down off Dogger Bank. Breath o' my body!" he continued, moving his hands as if he would wring them. "Black fortunes can be met an' grinned at, but villainy take the peace out o' you for evermore. I should wish to thank you, sir," he added abruptly to Mr. Oscar, but with a voice that palpably grew

more feeble, "for all your kindness, though I I hevn't shown my gratitude by my good works."

"Those who have are few in number," said Mr. Oscar kindly; "to quote some words from Dante, 'a little stuff would furnish out their cloaks.'"

"You'll try an' give me a little dole o' credit, sir, for comin' to put back the lost sovereign? You'll try an' forgive me? an you'll hev an eye on George? An' there's the little will you made for me, leavin' what there is to him, an' you'll think o' Mrs. Josham's loan and Swindell's bet?"

"I will!"

The fisherman closed his eyes, but soon reopened them, and fixed them upon the candle which had been brought into the room, for the frequent veiling by swiftly passing clouds of the few stars that had appeared made their light but a timid and sickly one.

Weird whispers seemed winding through the leaves of the shrubs outside, and the dark limbs of the old yew tree shook themselves in murmurous disorder.

When the dying man spoke again he could only whisper.

"The wind sweep by, sir, as if some power o' the air were draggin' a pall across the house, an' there's holler sighin's an' whistlin's, an' chokin' sounds, as if dying men hard-by were strugglin' for to speak. God Almighty forgive me, and guide my son!"

For a minute his lips moved, but his words no one on this side of the grave shall know.

Then he turned aside his head slightly, and was dead.

In the morning Mr. Oscar went, with reverent steps, to look upon the corpse. He opened the window of the little room. The sunlight gave a spiritual beauty to the moistened leaves, and the aisles and nooks of

shadow thrown by the shrubs danced and twinkled buoyantly, as if in glee ; but the once athletic and impulsive frame was still for ever now.

" A strong and noble form," said Mr. Oscar softly ; " a fitting casket for heroic manhood. Poor fellow! But the Reaper may have marked much good in some whom men think merely weeds, and have shovelled underground in haste, with the echo of the clanking spade outliving their words of sorrow."

## CHAPTER XVI.

THE Coroner, summoned by a telegram from Mr. Oscar, held an early inquest upon the body of George Boulder, on the day after his death, and the jury's verdict imputed blame to no one.

On the same day Clara Ashbocking returned; but Mr. Oscar did not need the stimulus of her entreaties to urge him to set about the various formalities necessary to procure George Hern's release from prison. On the evening before the day fixed for his father's funeral the young man, stirred by many conflicting feelings, recrossed that gloomy threshold which had been trodden by

many bearers of darkened spirits with their sorrows, mysteries, and sins.

Mr. Oscar sent him money for his lodgings outside the gaol that night, and for his railway fare to Raddiston on the following day; but he gave this to his friend the warder, who was an old soldier, and who had secretly tried to lighten his heavy heart by a few short chats about brigades and battalions and fortalices and redoubts, subjects that had still a charm for Hern. The distance from the county-town to Heathhammock was but four and twenty miles, so he resolved to gratify his vigorous and long idle limbs by starting home at once on foot.

It was a bitter sorrow to him that his father should have been taken from him thus suddenly, and for a time he shuffled along with gloomy heart and countenance; but, at length, a strange, keen feeling of enjoyment, roused within him by the air, the exercise

and the sense of freedom, prevailed. Those monotonous, weary hours he had spent in his narrow cell, watching the little sunlight shift from one corner to the other, deprived of the old comfort of his work to ease his thoughts, and without the power of fixing his mind upon the few poor books the warder lent him, had taught him how strong was the spirit of liberty within him ; and now it gave a buoyancy to his step, while the rays of reviving hope, suddenly succeeding to many grievous broodings upon the apparent realisation of his worst forebodings, upon the evident ruin of his wild, but once steadfastly and fondly cherished dreams—broodings that seemed to harden his heart and to utterly undermine his faith in God and man—brought brightness to his eye and a warm flush to his cheek.

And when he thought upon his dead father, as he did again and again, he thanked God in his heart that he had suffered for his sake,

and that the parting, which had come at last, had not been brought about by any unfilial or ungrateful act of his.

But he dared not look too thoughtfully upon his future yet. It seemed enough for him at present to think tenderly of his father, and of the part they two had played together in the past. He took from his pocket Mr. Oscar's letter, in which he said that the old fisherman had died peacefully, and re-read it thankfully. He walked far that night, but stopped to rest at last in a shed built of four rough tree-trunks, with walls and flat roof, all of twisted boughs and heather, which stood inside a meadow separated from the road by a tall bank, shaggy with nettles, and those too plentiful robbers, thistles. A little stream ran near his resting place, and its music, as it lightly rippled over its stones and gurgled among its cresses and under its overhanging multitude of tender grass-blades, like a baby

pleased with its embroideries, served as a pleasant lullaby, and brought before him in his first dream the solemn utterance of the sea, its mighty stir, its frothing curls, and the tremulous and ever-shifting shadows of its waves.

He awoke early, but his mind was at first depressed by meditations connected with the mournful office of the day. As he went on his way, however, in the fresh morning air, the charm of the earth around him cheered him somewhat, and he strode along with vigour.

There had been times, during his imprisonment, when he began to think that the earth would not charm him much again, and that he must look for peace to the life to come. Yet when the tread-mill had ceased to roll, and in the ghostly stillness he looked through the narrow window of his cell at the saintly purity of the sky, and fancied he could see night creeping over its face, like a veil, its fringe

now faintly visible, now lost, a fleeting line like many a boundary-mark in the world of thought, he often longed to exchange that view for one of the Common of Heathhammock; and the moon, with the little he could see of the leagues of starry sky around it, would sometimes make him think yearningly of his bed-room at leafy little Sunrise Lodge, and how that moon would paint his window blind with the lustre of a snow-steppe, and would make the little garden show like a ripened oat-field, and silver the hedge-row dew-drops, and throw a spark-fringed dappled path across the olive sea. And, this morning, he could not but feel that his friendship with the earth was not yet ended.

On reaching Heathhammock he went at once to Mr. Oscar Ashbocking's, where he knew the body was laid. The coffin was already screwed down, so that he could not look upon his father's face again.

Nor could he see Clara Ashbocking, for Mrs. Oscar had been seized with acute inflammation of the brain, and her daughter would not leave her bedside. She sent her hearty congratulations to him, however, through her father.

The town-clerk received him very kindly.

"I welcome you back with all my heart, George Hern," he said, once more grasping his hand cordially.

"And I thank you with all my heart, sir," said Hern.

"You speak with deep earnestness, as if the salvoes of an emperor's artillery could not make you happier and prouder than my poor greeting."

"They could not."

"I shall never forget your sorrow and your sacrifice, my friend. You recall Sydney Smith's words, 'the sublimity of endurance.' Your burthen has been, as Prometheus said

of that of Atlas, 'no easy weight.' If the world blames your action as imprudent, it will appreciate the generosity it displays, and it will signify its appreciation, though perhaps not with the spreading of flowers and chaplets, as in the days when T. Quintius and Curio were publicly applauded. Upon my word, I'm rather proud of you, Hern. Despite a few oddities, you have seldom been guilty of miscarriages, and that is not a slight acknowledgment in these hot and restless days, when, moreover, charmed personages like Gyges and Achilles are not to be found; and I am glad you have been proved innocent of this theft. 'Though robbery was in Boulder's blood, no stain in thine doth lie,' if I may so alter Lockhart's ballad. Yet how true the statement of Goethe, 'It is the property of crime to extend its mischief over innocence.' But history, as Escobedo says, shall put every man to

his proper place. Poor Boulder's death has cleaned and purified his picture. I am sure you were glad to learn that he appeared to die with a peaceful soul. I trust he did! I trust he did! Perhaps his last hours were cheered by vague glimpses of a tolerable future for you—I will not say by a vision like that revealed by Anchises to his son, within the ivory gate, but a vision of a tolerable future, improved by his own removal, you understand. He showed his penitence, in his strange way. It is not given to many of us to write a book or even a verse of Ecclesiastes."

The funeral was most simple, but a large number followed the corpse The fisher-folks attended out of respect for their old comrade, and many others in compliment to George Hern, who was now spoken of throughout Heathhammock as a brave fellow and a good son.

After the ceremony, Hern went to his

former lodgings at Deadman's Place, and shut himself up in his bedroom, till he was prevailed upon by the importunate requests of Mrs. Josham to go down to her sitting-room for a change. To his surprise he found visitors there—Mrs. Garlick, Mr. and Mrs. Swindell, Mr. Bilge, Mr. Mumbles, and Mrs. Swidger.

"You'll think it odd seein' us here, I dare say," said Mr. Swindell; "but we asked Mrs. Josham's leave to come here, Mr. George, to pay our respec's, an' to say, as to your loss, we're sorry for you, an' that's the truth; an' as to your conduc', we're proud of you, an' that's the truth too. An' Mr. Oscar has paid the little bet I had with your poor father, who I forgive, though he sneered at my ole hat, which it's as good as Mr. Kidds' wide-awake; and Mr. Mumbles, he's here to say there's no malice bore for any warm words as hev took place at the Lug-sail in times past."

"No, no," said Mr. Mumbles, "all's forgot an' done with; an' if your poor father didn't quite unnerstan' the humours o' the Lug-sail, it's like this here, it's no use talkin' about it now; an' though he died in his boots, after all, it's no use talkin' o' that now ayther. I'm sorry for him, an' I've had very sepulchrial sort o' meetins' at my house ever since his death."

"Mr. George," said Mrs. Swidger, "for Emmer Trippin'ton an' myself, which I don't find it no easy matter to leave the house this night, I congratulate you, for your name is in the mouth of Heathhammock as the name of Hern may hev been before now, though not pleasantly. I can remember a many of the Herns; I can remember when your mother's father's brother come to my father's such a objec', an' tied his rags and tatters together, an' said he was doin' his tylet, an' my father gev' him a quarter peck o' winter pears, which was all he could spare."

"That was kind of him," said Hern.

"Ay, there's kindness in the poor as well as among them that can give the worth of a carriage an' pair, or a yard o' bullocks, an' not miss 'em," said Mr. Swindell. "It's easy to give a pint o' mild ale if you can afford to give twenty pocket o' hops."

"I wish my boys may grow up so as to be praised as you seem like to be, Mr. George," said Mrs. Garlick; "an' the little mawthers, too, but they 'most in gin'ral give me satisfaction, that they do."

"A wise wish," said Mr. Bilge; "an' I'd like to say, Mr. George, that I've often thought that your face, when one looked into it, showed the man of honour as plain as a dorg, a ferret-box, an' a set o' traps show a man to be a ratcatcher or a warrener."

"To be sure," said Mr. Swindell; "though a Hern, he ain't a bad un. Is he to be thought poor on, because a Hern? You might as well

say, 'To the devil wi' steamships!' . . . because there's now an' again a run-down."

"Some folks think, Mr. George," said Bilge, "that there's a good time coming for you; an' I guess, from the talk at my people's table at dinner to-day, that there's some little stir about Mr. Oscar probably takin' you by the hand, an' as to how your betters (in point o' money) are to treat you; an' says my master, 'I always thought the lad's manners were a little distinguished.'"

"An' so did I," said Mrs. Swidger; "an' I was never the one to speak poor of him, though there may be some," she added, looking at Mr. Bilge, "that didn't used to be over frien'ly, but think it right to forget an' forgive, I s'pose, or perhaps think that, if so be a certain person is like to rise, it's better to be frien's than foes. All I can say is, Mr. George, if you do rise, I wish you well; an' I make bold to say that there's a chance for

you, for the new clerk which come to take your place didn't give no satisfaction, and got a-quarrellin' with Mrs. Oscar in the passage, so much so as I heard he should say if she 'd bin a man he'd ha' knocked her six yards; an' he left, an' the business, I hear, havn't been doin' so well without you. An' if you get into favour again, an' if you rise even to gettin' our Miss Clara, I wish you well, an' I hope she'll make you a good wife, an' that mean much, for there be wives that'll turn a reprobate husband, and there be wives that 'ud keep a good husband aground if he had twenty pair o' eagles' wings. It ain't for me, Mrs. Swindell, to ask you how you bring up your daughter, but there be some that play the pianner when they ought to be washin' the shirts or makin' the pudding-bags."

"I wish to say nothin' against you, Mr. George," said Mrs. Swindell, "but beware o'

what I call a patched-up weddin' an' an unequal wedding."

"Ay, ay," said her husband; "all the talk of all the women in Heathhammock about the presents an' the dresses an' the arrangements 'ont make up for what's to come of a patched up marriage."

"Oh, but there'll be a many 'ull be glad to hear the church bells ring for the marriage of Mr. George to Miss Clara," exclaimed Mrs. Swidger, disregarding the appealing look Hern gave her, "though Mr. Storker 'ont. He'll look, I guess, as if every one o' the bells give him a knock on the head. I've heard he's a'ready much out o' spirits, an' stormed at a poor old fisherman horrible that asked him for a little tobacco."

"Between ourselves," said Mr. Bilge, "that youth 'll spring a leak, if he don't take care. I can remember his settin' one o' his dorgs on to a string o' clogs hangin' outside Mrs.

Trash Powditch's bazaar; an' the dorg down with 'em, an' dragged 'em along the street with a clatter like them blessed hurdles on wheels. But don't you go to aim too high, Mr. George."

"No, no," said Mr. Swindell, impressively; "an' take care your rise ain't like that o' the worm, which creep from under the earth an' is carried squigglin' by the thrush to the top o' the tree. A marriage with unsuitableness is about as unfit for happiness as house-tops an' drill-yards an' play-grounds, an' turnpikes for cabbage growth. Howsomever, in regards o' your turnin' out o' this scrape so well, I'm pleased of it, an' so was my wife, when she heard the news. She got up, an' I a'most thought she'd ha' kissed me. Ah, you may smile, but in the reg'lar way her mouth seem quite as much inclined, like, for scoldin' (though she's a good wife), an' her tongue, to tell the truth, seem to twang false-like in sentimental tones."

"Swindell," exclaimed his wife sharply, "don't you be a cacklin' fool!"

"If your tongue was a sword, missus," said her husband, "I'd be covered with scars, an' that's the truth."

"An' the rights of it, too," rejoined his wife. "Am I to be lorded over by such a cackler? I'd rather go an' listen to the shiverin' o' the trees, or the hogs sussin' their swill, or the ole hens pratin' on the dust-bin."

"Well, well," said Mr. Swindell, "though I am a man who can silence most men pretty easy, I always was, an' I s'pose I always shall be, talked to by you as if no better an' a corn poppy rooted up, or a vine frozen to dead, or a bit o' rotten groun'sel, or goose-grass, or pimpernel. Well, anything for peace with a woman, so I'll say you're a bit o' silver saxifrige, a bit o' chestnut blossom. An' now, we must be goin'."

"You must give us a feast, Mr. George, if

ever you hev the luck to coller Miss Ashbockin'," said Mr. Mumbles, "an' my friend Bumper Swindell here, he'll try and justify his name o' Cut-away at it."

"Ay, a feast, an' a band o' music," croaked Mrs. Swidger, rising to depart.

"No, no," said Mr. Swindell; "no bandin' an' drummin'. A drum's a scarin' sort o' thing, an' speak o' wars. For my part, I don't want to think of havin' a bullet or a bit o' bairnet in my insides as well as the beer an' the beef."

"My friends," said Hern, "you are letting your imaginations run away with you. We will talk no more on this subject, if you please. But will you tell me, Mrs. Swidger, how your mistress is getting on?" he added, lowering his voice.

"Bad, Mr. George, I fear," said the old cook, "though it's an ill wind that blows nobody no good, an' I must say we have

a better time of it in the kitchen now she's kept in her bed-room; but she keeps there against her will, I can tell you. She jumps out o' bed at all sorts o' hours, an' make all sorts o' noises. She say she 'ont be caged up, an' 'ud rather take a bed in the boggy marshes among the tadpoles and will-o'-the-wisps; an' once she got right down stairs, an' took some thing out o' the kitchen-cupboard surreptuously; an' she wanted poor Emmer Trippin'ton to go to Mr. Kidd's an' get some old linen for her rag-bag, an' some empty bottles, an' all the pins off Mrs. Kidd's tylet-table; and when she hesitated, she called her obstinate and crack-brained. But that evenin' she gave the gal an ole hat, which poor Emmer she sat up an hour by the clock in her bed-room tryin' to find some good part in it, but couldn't, and when she wore it out abroad next day, the boys jeered her. But she's terrible cut up about mistress. 'Poor,

poor mistress!' she say; 'when once a person go off her head, no matter how clever she be, she go down amongst the most odds an' ends folks, an' nobody don't care for her.'"

"I fancied there was somethin' queer comin' to that person," said Mr. Bilge. "The very last time I spoke to her, we got talkin' of poverty, an' she said folks didn't make enough o' their opportunities; an' among other things, she said, 'One might think it's practable,' she said, 'to trap enow small birds for a pie, and to catch a dinner o' roach,' said she, 'at the expense of on'y a few worms.' And then she said this: 'There's lots o' things o' some value throw'd away. Ain't there feathers on a pisoned rook?' said she, 'an' skin on a pisoned rat?'"

"Ay, she talked somethin' like that the other night, when I sat up with her to rest Miss Clara," said Mrs. Swidger. "'Would my husband hev bin in such a good position

but for me ?' she said ; and then she went on to tell me how she used to keep pigeons when she was a gal, an' liked to think of 'em often feedin' at other folks' expense ; an' then she told me her aunt left her money to buy a mournin'-ring, but she kep' the money for other purposes. After that she began to talk wild again, told me to pack up in hampers all the things in the lumber-room, an' to ask Miss Clara not to dye her hair green, an' to ask Mr. Kidd to give her his spetticles, an' to make some scheme whereby promises could be exchanged for things o' more value, an' to ask the rector to come every day to wind up the kitchen-clock. An' after that, she shuffled out o' bed, an' tried to get an ole glove on to her foot; an' when her husband came into the room she made him read out o' the book she called 'Clark on Climate,' and then snatched it away from him to teach him to turn over the leaves neat, but threw the book down, an'

held his hand over the candle; an' then begged for a ten-poun' note, which he contented her by givin' her a penny, which she hid under the piller."

"A sad tale," said George Hern. "Does she not sleep much at night?"

"On'y a little, an' that restless as possible," said Mrs. Swidger. "She slep' a few minutes that night, an' then she told me she dreamed she was out walkin', an' stumbled against a baker's basket, and said, 'Stand out o' the way, boy,' an' asked a woman that was passin' why people didn't keep their child'en out o' the streets. An' then she went ramblin' on to say she should send Mrs. Pittock, who wear false hair, an old pocket-comb she picked up on the beach. This set her a smilin', but presently she was all frowns, an' said, 'I shall take that "Clark on Climate" an' throw it out o' winder, or I shall tear the leaves out of it an' scrub the bars o' the

stove with 'em, an' nobody shall prevent me.' Then she had another little sleep, an' this time she dreamed she called some idlin' boys 'skulkin' fellers,' an' one of 'em pretended he saw a wasp on her back, an' gave her a soundin' slap there, which woke her. Poor thing, poor thing! where's her strong mind now?"

## CHAPTER XVII.

One evening, about a month after Mrs. Swidger's rather lengthy communications concerning her mistress, Mr. Oscar Ashbocking and his daughter, both in deep mourning, were seated together in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Oscar's illness had ended in her death. Her mind and memory almost deserted her at the last, and her delirious speech was, for the most part, a series of incoherent sentences, intermixed with favourite sayings, such as "Value received," and "Prompt and sound!"

On two occasions, however, there was evidence of thought in her utterances; once, when she refused to take (as she often would)

her medicine, she said, "Throw physic to the dogs,—though, no—that would be folly and waste, for I think it probable they won't take it." And, once, when she had been railing at Trippington with some severity, and Clara tried to pacify her, she said, "I know all about what you say—a worm will turn. What then? It will make but a poor opposition."

Clara, worn out by anxious nursing, had been ill herself also, and, indeed, this day had been the first on which Dr. Staggold had allowed her to come downstairs.

The released prisoner had been taken back into the office, and had willingly resumed his old work there, and his examination studies, and, on two evenings, his shorthand work with Mr. Oscar. His long enforced absence from Clara did not lead him for a moment to distrust her constancy, but he sorely longed to speak to her again. With a chastened feeling of consolation he

recognised, of course, in the recent ravages of death, the removal of two obstacles to the attainment of his best hopes, and it was mortifying to find a new impediment in the form of illness.

This evening Mr. Oscar, who had been acutely distressed by the loss of his tried and prudent help-mate, was in better spirits than he had before been since her death. He was pleased to see his daughter downstairs, and, moreover, had just enjoyed a characteristic discussion with a learned visitor, Dr. Bective, which touched upon Apellicon's alterations of Aristotle, the wordy pedantry of Hindoo logic, the ethics of the sixth Æneid, Linnecar's plays, Bythner's "Lyra Prophetica," Zoroaster, Haak and Postel.

After she had spoken a few quiet words about her mother, Clara suddenly drew her chair nearer to her father's, and said frankly, and with a wistful, and very winning look :

"Father, I am going to ask you, who look at the essential truth and right of things, you know, to give your consent to my marriage with George Hern. Did you expect this?"

"To answer candidly, I did," he replied; "but I might be a more prudent father if I pretended to be astonished at such a statement."

"Have you thought of the matter seriously?" she asked eagerly, her eyes bright with hope.

"To answer candidly again, I have, very seriously and very often."

"And your judgment, father?"

"I shall try to overcome all scruples and give my consent."

She threw her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"I thank you most heartily!" she exclaimed, almost sobbing. "The past has been smeared and dimmed, like the sea in a

sweeping rain, but the future is now bright and clear!"

"I think you illustrate Mrs. Browning's line, 'but women are knights-errant to the last,'" said Mr. Oscar, looking kindly at her. "Ah, Clara, I know the value of money and the value of position, but I am resolved not to oppose your wishes on so serious a subject, my girl. Your happiness can only be assured in one way—that I know well. Without a certain man as your husband the world will seem to you, to quote Mülner, 'the grave of all your hopes,' and if you were tied to any other man, I feel sure that your smiles would no more mean happiness than the trembling hands of a palsied man mean sportiveness. Any other marriage would be as obnoxious to you as a dish of the poisoned herbs of Thessaly. Now that my great stay and long-appreciated companion is taken from me, I feel the stronger affection

(never weak I hope) for the treasure left me; and I wish to deal tenderly and wisely with you. As to Hern, I am still, as I have always been, partial to him, and proud of him. He has proved himself worthy—even of you. I trust he will continue to act creditably."

"He will; and we shall always welcome your kind face as an auspicious spectacle."

"Thank you. I believe you will be happy with Hern. I don't think he will be an illustration of Josephus' remarks respecting kingdoms: 'I cannot but think that the change into prosperity often becomes an occasion of mischief and transgression.' You will have little crosses to bear, of course. His generosity will gain him friends, but his sensibility will shut him out for a time, I guess, from many."

"We shall have as many friends as we shall need," she exclaimed gravely; "and I am contented that those who have the least

scruple about visiting us should keep aloof. All the scorn at their command will harm us very little."

"No one can libel your genuine attachment to so good a fellow," said Mrs. Oscar. "If society is a little cold at first——"

"Why, we shall find consolation in our own society then."

"Well, I shall be able to give Hern a share in the business, that will put you, I hope, in comfortable circumstances. His uniform and unwearying diligence makes it a matter of pleasure to think of him as a partner. No doubt the world will have some whispering and shoulder-shrugging; but my conscience is not uneasy; and, for the rest, surely an expression of difference of opinion should be allowed in these liberal days, as well as in the times of Mardonius and Artabanus. I am really inclined to applaud your choice, Clara. To begin with, I agree with Sydney's dictum

that love must regard the terrestrial as well as the angelical parts of a man's composition, and with Pliny, who highly approved of a fine person in a husband. But I had better not go into this subject," he said, abruptly. I have paid more attention to the mind than to the heart, which indeed is beyond the scrutiny of man, and know little of what Sterne calls 'the hot and poetic indiscretion of passion,' though, my dear, I can understand something of the charm of such an eye as yours. Hern is, and should be, proud indeed to have gained your affection. The constant affection of one who would never allow another to censure him, though sometimes tolerably meek in censure herself—one who, I think, when the poor fellow was wrongfully under a shadow, would have said with Cesira in Aristodeno, 'Whatever be thy misdeed, within my heart is written thy full defence;' one who would bravely face all difficulties for his sake;

never acting in the spirit of the heroine in Zochokke's 'Broken Cup,' who said to her lover, 'I did give the ribbon to thee, yet thou shouldst not have worn it so openly.'"

His statement was stopped by a tap at the door, and the entrance of Trippington, announcing Mr. and Mrs. Kidd, and Mr. Storker Ashbocking.

"We have come to give you a complimentary call, my dear," said Mrs. Kidd, to Clara, "on what I may call your first appearance as mistress here."

"I am glad you have come," said Mr. Oscar, "for I shall boldly tell you what I have just been telling Clara, and thus at once avoid all future risk of misunderstanding."

And looking to Clara for her consent, which she signified by a smile, he forthwith explained the result of their recent interview.

Mr. Kidd fingered his lip nervously, and

took off his spectacles, and Storker looked rather sheepishly at the pictures. Mrs. Kidd was the first to speak.

"Well, I must say I never thought you would give your consent to this in downright earnest—at least, so soon," she exclaimed, with raised eyebrows. "Not that I wish to interfere, or to say anything that Clara won't like."

"I have made up my mind, Bella," said Mr. Oscar, with a decision of tone seldom heard during his late wife's lifetime. "I shall not take upon myself to choose a husband for Clara, as Clisthenes did for Agarista. She has chosen for herself. I have had ambitious thoughts connected with her; but I shall not deal with Hern as Wallenstein did with poor Max. Humble as you may think him, there is true worth in him; and many a sage from very ancient times has written in hearty praise of the humble. There is sincere affec-

tion between the young people, and that should influence our judgements, even if we cannot quite excuse Dinah, in the old song, for taking the cup of cold poison. Clara can marry no one but Hern 'rejoicing,' as the Greeks say; and I am sure you would not wish to see her as Lady Russell once discribed herself, 'amazed with grief.' You would not like me to blight her future, to cast a shadow upon the little space allotted to her between this evening and the day she is carried to that little synagogue, as the Hebrew has it, the grave. I shall, in due time, give your son, if we suit each other, a share in my business equal to that I shall give to my friend Hern; so the two young men must become friends, as I am sure they will, Clara and her husband shall have apartments in this old house, which is too large for me, and, without Clara, might seem to me as Sir Thomas Munro's did to him without

his wife, to have an air of some deserted mansion in romance."

Mrs. Kidd, with eyebrows still elevated, was about to make some rejoinder, when Storker, dreading a clumsy reference to himself, interposed.

"Your offers, with respect to myself, sir," he said, "are liberal and encouraging."

"Yes," said Mr. Kidd, "and I wholly and fully appreciate them; and though I've sometimes expressed my opinion in favour of a certain check being placed on Hern's ambition, I have nothing to say against your plans, Oscar, now."

"That's well," said Mr. Oscar, with a smile. "I think the two young men will be able to keep the business together. My opinion of Hern is well known. I was glad indeed to get him back again, for Mr. Ife, the new clerk, who left so suddenly (not influenced by the spirit of Lysimachus), was a

poor substitute for him. But, Clara, you must spare him for me sometimes in the evening, for I shall continue my reading and study-amusements, being as much as ever of Louis XI.'s opinion, that books should not be amassed for show only. Perhaps I can compose the suggested book of essays now. Anyhow, I sadly want some notes taken down concerning Mesmer and Meyerstein, and as to solitary reading, only last night I tried a little of Lucretius, and found it as dry a companion as Berkenhaut's 'Synopsis.'"

"For my part, sir," said Storker, "I should think him, under the most favourable circumstances, about as interesting a companion as a moth at your gig-lamp at midnight, or a mummy, or a baked monk. If it will be any satisfaction to Clara," he continued, turning towards her, and speaking with some earnestness, "I freely say that I shall be happy to work with George Hern, that I always really

liked him, and always respected him, from the time that he helped her and me in an unpleasant adventure. He has made better use of his time than I have of mine, and in spite of all the disadvantages he has had to contend with, he is a gentleman. Moreover, I must not forget that I and the old cannon helped to unsettle him years ago, and to get him into his first scrape. Misfortune has made me a little philosophical, not to say humble."

Clara went to him and took his hand with a look of gratitude.

"Your bravery and constancy will make me think the better of your sex," he said. "I congratulate you heartily."

"You have already converted Storker to some of your views," said Mr. Oscar merrily.

"Yes, positively," said Storker, with a smile, though evidently not quite relishing Mr. Oscar's remark. "I can't promise to

relinquish all sport, but I intend to be prodigiously careful in the matter, you know. I shall rail at the fiendish brutality of the cattle-markets, and shall tell the drovers that no Millennium can be expected till animals are treated very differently. Henceforth I shall pay some attention to the plaintive note of a lonely little bird on a bleak November afternoon. When I hear a thud in a wood in winter, I shall stop to see whether it is an ice-bead that has fallen or a frozen robin; and I shall try and detect in the lark's song, as she soars aloft, some mystic and instructive note of gratitude for the tuft of grass that has sheltered her during the night——"

"I am, and ought to be, in such a good humour," said Clara smiling, "that I give you leave to amuse yourself a little with sarcasm."

"Sarcasm! Have I not always been fond of animals, at least horses and dogs?"

"I fear your admiration was confined to their utility, for the most part," she replied.

"You would put me down in that class who admire the stars, not for their majestic enkindling of the depths of heaven, but for their lighting up of man's pettifoggings."

"To hear Storker talk a little in favour of our sex is something considerable," said Mrs. Kidd. "I have heard him say that woman's charms could no more gratify him than a slice of rainbow or the shadow of a boiled swan would gratify my poor papa when he was hungry. I have heard him say, too, that when a woman praised him, he only fell to speculating how long it would be before she condemned him, and that he was heartily glad he was not a cochineal, because among these insects there are about a hundred and fifty females to one male."

"And that he would rather walk over a bath full of firkin butter, or of fire from the

infernal pit of Tophet on a greased barber's-pole, than trust in a woman's smile," said Mr. Kidd.

"And he would talk with such enjoyment about the woman who was burned to death in this county for murdering her husband," said Mrs. Kidd, "and about the selling of wives, and the ducking of scolds."

"But I find that Bird, our Suffolk poet," said Storker, "has written in praise of woman's tongue, woman's faith, and woman's heart, 'that peerless amulet.'"

"The very thing I have heard you speak of as possessing less true worth than a pound of volcanic tuff," said Mr. Kidd.

"Well, I hope you will be happy, Clara, my dear," said Mrs. Kidd, "and I hope we shall, too, though at one time I didn't like the notion of farming, except for pleasure. But I wish that boy of Kidd's, that does the odd jobs, had a less surly countenance. He

certainly doesn't look like one of the 'shepherd boys who know not care.' One comfort, Kidd will have other occupations, though I hope he won't have any dangerous chemicals about, nor enter into any strange schemes."

"Why should you interfere with the schemes," said Storker, "if there's no capital embarked in them? Why should not a man employ his spare hours in planning projects for the grafting of hair upon the potato, or the making of wristband-studs of plumbago, so that one might write on one's dance-programme with these instead of a pencil."

"I shall have scope, I hope, for a few little experiments in connection with my farm," said Mr. Kidd.

"If you had lived when Virgil wrote his lines upon the death of Cæsar," said Mr. Oscar, "he might not have written, 'Tillage hath lost its due regard.'"

"I hope we shall have no more troubles

for a long time," said Mrs. Kidd, with a sigh, "and that Kidd will have more peace of mind and plenty of time to sit down quietly and smoke his pipe. Besides, I am really very delicate, and shall not live long, though a Howsegoe. But perhaps I ought not to grumble at the change in our fortunes, though poor papa would, had he been alive—if, indeed, he did not use stronger language than mere grumbling, for he sometimes found it hard to keep from swearing. Why, I can remember when his hat fell down the sacred well on the Knottywold estate, which we were showing to some friends, he swore most terribly against the very walls of the chapel. And I shall never forget how he stormed at breakfast one morning after a night of cards and betting, during which he lost fourteen pounds, a seal, a pencil-case, and a stuffed penguin. Well, well, we must do our best for the future; and there is one thing, we

shall not have poor papa telling us that he could have done better if he had had the management of things. As to Castle House, it was rather an anxiety, and I was not quite satisfied with the servants, and think Bilge, though civil, a little deceitful. He would never look you for long in the face, and a person that is ashamed to do that is no true man, woman, or child. As to church-work, I shall keep on with that. As to position, Lady Stowers and Mrs. Monument are as kind to me as ever, and I dare say Clara's marriage won't make them less so. We shall continue to be among what I call 'the comfortable classes.' Of course, we shan't go into company so much (not that Kidd would ever go very much), but then there's the worry of getting Kidd ready in time and the trouble of dressing myself both spared; and I am as happy in my old green shawl, after all, as in anything. I am heartily glad

Storker's prospects are so good, he seems to me to grow more and more like the Howsegoes; though it would have been wiser if we could have saved a little money for him—not that I wish to interfere. Some one will profit by all Kidd's spendings, and his labour, and stooping, and perspiring in the garden and green-houses at Castle House."

"To be sure, and I have myself profited in health," said Mr. Kidd. "We must do all we can for Storker in the future. Perhaps," he added, with one of his complacent smiles, "I could be of some service to him even in regard to his law, for I know a little about law; though it would not have been wise to admit this during poor Mary Ann's life, so great was her abhorrence of amateur lawyers. No creditor or other person," he added, touching his forehead, "can take away the contents of this."

"Thank you for your offer, father," said Storker, with a sly twinkle in his eye, "even if the practical help you would be able to give me would be somewhat of the kind a young butcher would derive from the study of Raffaelle's cartoon (Paul at Lystra) in which the impending slaughter of a beast is shown."

"You must rely upon yourself, Storker," said Mr. Oscar; "keeping in check what I would call, in the words of Steele, your 'gay inclinations.' Monks have their frolics sometimes, I know well—but I won't preach to you."

"Thank you, sir," said Storker; "I shall settle down, I hope; though, I dare say, I should find it hard to sit still at my desk if I heard a steeple had tumbled down near at hand with its bells and dials, and had overturned a carriage full of tetchy old ladies into a gunsmith's shop-window."

"Storker will settle down," said Mrs. Kidd, "and work well, and content himself with his new home, with his parents, and Ariel, though what's to become of that dreadful Moloch I can't say. I'm sorry I've made you shudder, Clara, but it was owing to your own merciful intercession he wasn't destroyed. And as to Castle House, I'm glad we didn't undertake those grand repairs and improvements, for the other day, when Kidd was out, I saw a sample of what we might have expected. When a man came to repair a little place in the roof at our cottage, which I think I might call a villa, he sat down before it as if to conciliate it, and took several draughts from a bottle he carried in his basket before beginning. But we must be going home. Well, Clara, I hope you'll get on nicely with the housekeeping you'll begin to-morrow. It is satisfactory to have the help of the two servants, whom (though poor things, I am

afraid), your mother has made as good as they can be. She was such a careful woman! Storker says he believes that, before her illness, when she put a pair of slippers away one inside the other, she could tell you an hour afterwards which one was outside, from mere habit of close observation."

"Trippington and Swidger will stay with us, I hope," said Clara.

"As to Trippington," said Mr. Oscar, "though, indeed, during the lifetime of her poor mistress I have seen her stare at her with something of the blank despair of a young translator of Greek without lexicon or skill to guess at the meaning of the unknown words, and though I sometimes thought there was an air of slavery about her toils, yet I believe that, if liberty had been offered her, she would, like the Cappadocians, have declined it. Swidger will stay, too, though she has had the superintendence for years of

a pantry which cannot be called an Amalthean horn; tempting enough, nevertheless," he added, lowering his voice, "to draw your poor mother down to it once or twice, a little before her death, reminding me of Goethe's association of stealthy mouthfuls with childhood—in your mother's case, alas, a second childhood!"

"She was a good wife to you," said Mr. Kidd, "and almost as jealous of your reputation as Miss Herschell of her brother's. I dare say I could give you a little help in your household duties, Clara," he added, as his wife rose to leave. "I am acquainted with a few little things. Have your grilled bacon transparent, you know. Carve all round the breast of your turkey, regardless of the wings and legs; and give your best friend the back of your rabbit. Good-bye, and accept my good wishes."

* * * * *

Just as George Hern had closed his volume of "Leading Cases in Conveyancing" that evening, and had risen to go into his bedroom, a knock was heard at the outer door, and, soon afterwards, Mrs. Josham brought a letter to him, which she told him Trippington, "quite out o' breath," had just delivered.

The envelope was directed in Clara Ashbocking's handwriting, and he took out the letter with eager fingers and read:

"My Dear George,

"I cannot refrain from sending you these few lines.

"This evening my father sanctioned my marriage with you, making but a slight show of surprise, and I think I may say none of regret. You are to have a share in the business. Storker is friendly, and the unfortunate but pleasant-natured Kidds are satisfied.

"You will see me to-morrow! The meeting so earnestly longed for by me, and yet delayed so many days, has now a brightness cast upon it which rewards us for our waiting.

"I know that with you there is still the old love and the old trust! Old they seem to me; and when I look back upon the past, on this happy evening, my heart is full, and I find there are tears in my eyes while I smile.

"In the many, many pictures of you which I have drawn in my fancy of late, your face has become more thought-impressed and a little more proud, your glance more keen and wistful, and the light of your eyes has seemed to glow from a greater depth within them. To-morrow will reveal the truth! I wish to-night could—but I must not be impatient.

"I have thought much about you, and I

have suffered much! And your sufferings! Oh, how, in your case, a young soul has been overwhelmed with shadows! How a heart that, I know well, can feel intensely, has been tortured! I send you my praise. The naked prison walls you looked upon would seem to me as poetic as a dinted coat of mail in an old baronial hall, with moonlight and ivy shadows on it. They say that great sorrow and disappointment sometimes injure character. The self-imposed degradation of heroic innocence has not injured yours, I am sure.

"But now the clouds have passed away. If the world frowns a little upon our plans, such love as ours will clothe us with impenetrable armour. Such love as ours, too, would beautify for us an unromantic home, with willow-pattern crockery, and painted chairs, and web-girt (*not* araneous) beds, and would make us contented with a wardrobe which

would let us run no risk of infringing the old Mosaical law against wearing 'garments of divers sorts;' but you are to take a good position in the world, and it will suit you as fitly and naturally as the golden moss suits the palm-tree bark.

"Good-bye until to-morrow.

"CLARA."

THE END.

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